

What is Asthma?

Asthma is a lung condition that makes it hard to breathe. It can affect people of many different ages and can affect you differently throughout your life.



WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE?

People with asthma may have some of the following symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing or feeling short of breath
- Feeling of chest tightness
- Wheezing or whistling when breathing out
- Coughing that wakes you up at night
- Breathing that limits exercising or doing physical activity
- Needing to use a fast acting inhaler often (e.g. Albuterol HFA)

If you have difficulty breathing or are coughing for more than a few days or have any of the above signs of asthma talk to your healthcare provider. They can help determine if you would benefit from asthma treatment. Seek emergency help if you notice a worsening of your breathing, if your inhaler is not helping or if your breathing prevents you from doing the things you normally do, as these could be signs of an asthma attack.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

Asthma happens when the pathways of air in the lungs become blocked by inflammation and mucus. The cause of asthma is not fully known, but it may be partially caused by things in your environment and partially something passed down from parents to children.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES

Learn your asthma triggers and avoid them. Some people notice that certain environments and situations make their asthma worse, these are called triggers. Avoiding or managing triggers can help you better control your asthma. Some examples of asthma triggers are:

- Cold weather or weather changes
- Allergens or particles in the air (e.g. pet dander, mold, plants, flowers and others)
- Fumes (e.g. perfumes, cleaning products, air pollution, cigarette smoke and others)
- Swamp coolers
- Insects (e.g. dust mites and cockroaches)
- Some medications (e.g. ibuprofen, aspirin, beta-blockers like metoprolol and others)
- Some foods (e.g. foods with sulfites like wine, beer, dried fruit, shrimp and processed potatoes)

For more information, scan the QR code below, or visit nciph.org/asthma



Exercise regularly. Sometimes exercising can cause breathing difficulty. If this is the case, be sure to let your healthcare provider know, as there are medications available to help with these symptoms. In the long run exercise can help reduce your asthma symptoms and improve your heart and lung function.



Nutrition: Consider trying an elimination diet. This can help you learn whether there are any specific foods that make your asthma worse. Some people find eating less dairy foods can help with their asthma. Other foods like soy and wheat, and some food additives can make asthma worse for some people.

Manage Stress. Stress can cause you to feel anxious or overwhelmed and may cause breathing difficulty. Exercise, meditation and journaling are all ways to reduce stress—find one that is right for you.

Treat heartburn and acid reflux. Acid reflux can irritate the lungs and make it more difficult to breath. Avoid foods or other activities that cause heartburn or acid reflux (see our article about GERD).

Quit smoking. Cigarette smoke can make asthma worse and cause inflammation. Quitting will not only help with asthma but will improve your overall health.

HERBAL MEDICINES AND SUPPLEMENTS

These are several supplements that have shown some benefit in asthma:

- Magnesium 300 mg daily
- Pycnogenol 200 mg daily
- Boswellia serrata gum - preparation of gum resin of 300 mg three times daily for 6 weeks
- Choline chloride 1500 mg twice daily

Make sure to talk to your healthcare professional before taking any supplements or over the counter medicines.

