

YOUR CHILD AND ASTHMA

Asthma is a disease that makes it hard to breathe. About 7.1 million children in the United States have asthma. Asthma is a chronic (ongoing) disease. The earlier you know your child has asthma, the sooner it can be treated and managed.



Types of Asthma

Your child can have 1 of 4 types of asthma:

- **Intermittent:** no daily signs with little to no impact on normal activities
- **Mild persistent:** no daily signs with little to no impact on normal activities (but asthma episodes may interfere with difficult activities)
- **Moderate persistent:** daily symptoms that prevent normal activities
- **Severe persistent:** daily symptoms that prevent normal activities

Asthma Episodes

An asthma episode is often called an asthma attack. Asthma attacks happen when the sides of your child's airways swell, making it hard to breathe. Extra mucus is created during an attack. Less air can get into your child's lungs because of the mucus.

Asthma Triggers

No one knows for sure what causes asthma, but many things can trigger an episode. Common triggers include:

- Allergens
- Infections
- Excitement
- Irritants (such as cigarette smoke)
- Exercise
- Cold air
- Weather

Episode Warning Signs

Before an episode, your child may:

- Get cranky
- Have a dry mouth
- Cough
- Have a hard time sitting still
- Have itchy skin or a runny nose
- Feel tightness in their chest
- Feel out of breath

During an episode you might see:

- Unusual tiredness
- Restlessness in bed
- A scared or worried look
- A slouched posture
- Pale or sweaty skin
- Sunken spaces between the ribs
- Faster breathing

You might hear:

- Coughing
- Wheezing
- Noisy breathing
- Frequent throat clearing



Call 911 or your local medical emergency number immediately if your child:

- Has blue or gray lips or fingernails
- Has trouble talking
- Has extreme difficulty breathing
- Cannot stop coughing

Asthma Medications

Ask your child's healthcare provider what medicine is best and how to help your child take the medicine the right way. Remember that:

1. Some medicines are daily and others are only for quick relief
2. Metered Dose Inhalers (MDI) and Dry Powder Inhalers (DPI) are used differently
3. Inhalers, spacers or nebulizers may be used to treat asthma
4. Peak flow meters help you know if an asthma episode is coming, if your child's medicine is working and if their lungs are not working properly. Ask your child's healthcare provider to show you and your child how to use a peak flow meter the right way

Parents' Role in Asthma Management

Ask your child's healthcare provider to create a complete Asthma Action Plan that can be shared with others. Work with the healthcare provider to find the right treatment. You can also:

- Keep an asthma diary that includes your child's triggers, symptoms and medications taken
- Help your child avoid triggers
- Teach your child breathing techniques to help them relax

Your child may also feel depressed, guilty, angry, afraid, anxious or embarrassed about their asthma. Talk with your child about their feelings and ask your child's healthcare provider for help.

Managing Asthma at School

Work with school staff and administrators to keep your child's asthma controlled at school. Give them a copy of your child's most recent Asthma Action Plan and make sure they know what to do if your child has an episode. If your child needs medication at school, be sure it is labeled correctly and ask:

- How the medication is stored
- How your child can get to the medication, if needed
- If your child can carry their own medication
- If your child can take their medication without supervision

If your child is allowed to carry and take his/her own medication, make sure your child's healthcare provider agrees. Turn in all completed permission forms to the school. With the right care and preparation, your child can avoid asthma episodes and live a full and active life.