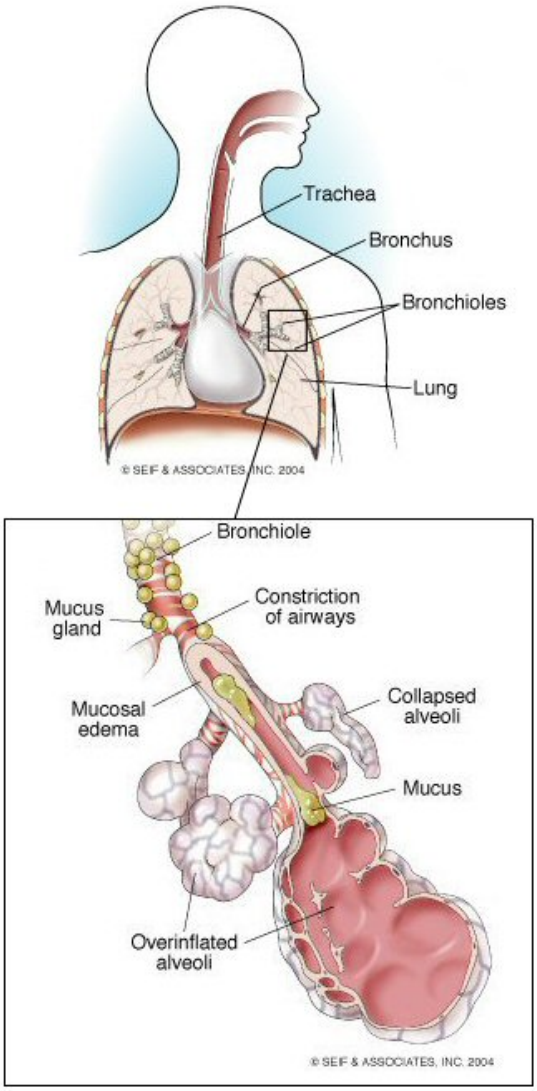
Asthma, Adult, Extended Version

Asthma is a long lasting disease of the lungs. It is often linked to allergies, *heredity* (family history), and your surroundings. It is a condition which causes an increased airway *inflammation* (soreness and redness). This causes recurring attacks of wheezing, coughing, chest constriction & difficult breathing. One of the main problems in asthma is airway inflammation. This is caused by the airways in the lungs being overly sensitive to certain triggers. These triggers will vary from person to person and time to time. They may cause a narrowing of the air passages in the lungs.



Asthma may be triggered by respiratory infections, plant pollens, dust, animal dander, molds, some foods, exposure to smoke, exercise and emotional stress among others. These substances are called *allergens* (things that cause allergic reactions or allergies). Repeat attacks are common. It is not known what causes patients to have asthma in the first place. There is no cure, just relief. Asthma has been increasing and this could be due to industrial pollution.

Adults with asthma usually fall into three groups:

- Lifelong asthma present since childhood.
- Those with childhood, got well, then suddenly had asthma return in their 40's or 50's
- Those who develop *occupational* (job-related) asthma.

SYMPTOMS

Asthma causes various breathing difficulties and varies from person to person. Usually, it is easier to get the air into the lungs and more difficult to get the air out. There may be wheezing, coughing, shortness of breath and tightness in the chest. When it is very difficult to breathe, there is often anxiety and a feeling as though you cannot get enough air.

CAUSES

Three common job-related substances that can cause allergies and asthma attacks include substances found in wrapping vinyl for meat, cottonseed and petroleum products. Sensitivity to meat wrapping vinyl is also called meat wrappers disease. Common triggers for asthma include:

- Dust.
- An infection.
- Reactions to certain medications.
- Animal dander.
- Breathing cold air.
- Workplace chemicals.
- Pollen.
- Exertion.
- Cigarette smoke.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Avoiding triggers is the best first line treatment to prevent asthma. Avoid anything that causes asthmatic attacks. If a couple specific things are found to cause your attacks, an allergist may be able to help you by using treatment to desensitize your system.
- If you are a smoker, **quit smoking**. Avoid exposure to second hand smoke.
- Use prescription medications as ordered by your caregiver. Medications are used to prevent or treat attacks. They do not cure asthma.
- Talk to your caregiver about an action plan for managing asthma attacks at home including the use of a peak flow meter which measures the severity of your asthma attack. An action plan can help minimize or stop the

attack without having to seek medical care.

- Always have a plan prepared for seeking medical attention including calling your physician, access to local emergency care, and calling 911 for a severe attack.
- You may have fewer attacks if you decrease dust in your home. Electrostatic air cleaners may help.
- It may help to replace your pillows or mattress with materials less likely to cause allergies.
- If you are not on fluid restriction, drink 8 to 10 glasses of water each day.
- Discuss possible exercise routines with your caregiver.
- Relaxation techniques may help during an asthmatic attack.
- If animal dander is the cause of asthma, you may need to get rid of pets.
- You may have to change jobs if your asthma is caused by your job.
- Be aware of the signs of asthma that require emergency medical care (see below).

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your usual medicines do not stop your wheezing, or there is increased coughing and/or shortness of breath.
- An oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C) develops.
- You have muscle aches, chest pain, or thickening of sputum.
- Your sputum changes from clear or white to yellow, green, gray, or bloody.
- You have any problems that may be related to the medicine you are taking (such as a rash, itching, swelling, or trouble breathing).

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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