

# What is Asthma?



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Asthma is a disease that affects your lungs. It is the most common long-term disease of children, but adults have asthma, too. Asthma causes repeated episodes of wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness, and nighttime or early morning coughing. If you have asthma, you have it all the time, but only have asthma attacks when something bothers your lungs.

We know that if someone in your family has asthma, you are also more likely to have it. In most cases, we don't know what causes asthma, and we don't know how to cure it. Asthma can be controlled by knowing the warning signs of an attack, staying away from things that trigger an attack, and following the advice of your health provider.

## What is an Asthma Attack?

An asthma attack happens in your body's airways, which are the paths that carry air to your lungs. During an asthma attack, the sides of the airways in your lungs swell, and the airways shrink. Less air gets in and out of your lungs, and mucus that your body produces clogs up the airways even more. The attack may include coughing, chest tightness, wheezing, and trouble breathing.

## How is Asthma Treated?

Your health provider will work with you to develop an action plan for treating your asthma. Your treatment might include making changes in your lifestyle and medication. There are two main types of medication—quick relief and long-term control. It is important to take your medication. If you don't, your asthma might get worse.



## What Can Trigger An Asthma Attack?

### Allergens

- Animal dander
- Dust mites (in house dust)
- Cockroaches and other pests
- Mold (indoor and outdoor) and Pollen

### Irritants

- Cigarette smoke
- Air pollution
- Cold air and changes in weather
- Strong odors (from painting or cooking)
- Strong emotions (stress, crying, laughing, etc.)

### Other Triggers

- Medications such as aspirin and beta-blockers
- Sulfites (like found in dried fruit or red wine)
- Worksite chemicals or dusts

## What If My Child Has Asthma?

1. Talk with your child's health provider.
2. Develop an [Asthma Management Plan \(Spanish\)](#)
3. Make sure you know the answers to questions like:
  - What triggers my child's asthma attacks?
  - How should she use her medication?
  - What do I do if she has an attack?
  - When should I call the doctor?
  - Who should I call in an emergency?
4. Talk with your child about her asthma. Make sure she can answer the questions above for herself. Help her follow her treatment plan and watch for problems.
5. Asthma Proof Your Home. Remember that asthma attacks can be triggered by things like mold growing on shower curtains or tiny dust mites that live in blankets.

Source: CDC & American Lung Association Websites