

Asthma

Information from the
[Allergy and Asthma Network](#)

Asthma is a long-term (chronic) lung disease that causes episodes of coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath. Like all chronic illnesses, asthma cannot be cured, but it is very manageable.

Common Asthma Symptoms:

- Coughing: Coughing from asthma is often worse at night or early morning. Sometimes it's your only symptom. It can be dry or mucus-filled.
 - Wheezing: This is a whistling or squeaky sound especially when you breathe out. Sometimes wheezing can be heard easily; other times you need a stethoscope.
 - Chest tightness: This can feel like something is squeezing or sitting on your chest.
 - Shortness of breath: You may feel breathless, like you can't catch your breath or breathe.
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How Does Asthma Affect the Lungs?

Your lungs are made up of miles and miles of tiny airways, from the large airway of the windpipe (trachea) to the tiny air sacs (alveoli) deep inside the lungs where oxygen moves into the bloodstream. Normally, your lungs bring in fresh air and push out used air, but when you have asthma it is harder to do this because:

- The linings of the airways swell
- Your body makes too much mucus, which clogs the airways
- Muscles around the airways get tight, making them narrow, with less room for air to pass through deeply enough. You may feel as though you are out of shape and constantly tired.

When you have asthma, your airways become easily inflamed and swollen. Since you can't feel or see what's going on, we call this airway inflammation the quiet part of asthma. If it's not treated, the inflammation increases and your symptoms are likely to get worse each time your airways are exposed to your asthma triggers.

What Causes Asthma Symptoms to Flare?

The first steps to managing asthma are paying attention to your body, recognizing the early signs of a flare and understanding what sets off your symptoms. What irritates your lungs and sets off your symptoms – often called your “triggers” — may be very different from what affects other people with asthma, even others in your own family. Perhaps you are affected by allergens, environmental irritants or exercise – or maybe symptoms only appear when you have a cold illness. Tracking symptoms, medications and activities with a daily symptom diary can help you identify your triggers and then take steps to avoid or reduce contact with them.

Common allergy-related asthma triggers:

- Outdoor allergens, such as mold and pollens from grass, trees and weeds
- Indoor allergens, such as dust mites, cockroaches, pet dander and mold

Common non-allergy-related triggers:

- Smoke, including personal use of tobacco products, secondhand smoke from others' smoking, and indoor fireplaces
- Irritants in the air such as air pollution, smoke, chemical fumes and strong odors
- Exercise
- Colds, flu and other respiratory illness
- Hormonal changes (both female and male)
- Weather conditions (such as cold air, humidity, thunderstorms) or weather changes
- Emotional anxiety and stress, including laughing or crying
- Some medications, including aspirin, NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen) and beta blockers
- Acid reflux, or GERD, with or without heartburn
- Some food allergies