

# Asthma in children

A lot of children get asthma. It's the most common chronic condition in children. Asthma cuts down the air flow in the lungs. This makes it hard to breathe.



## SYMPTOMS

- Chronic coughing
- Trouble breathing
- Tight feeling in the chest
- Wheezing

(**Note:** Other things can cause wheezing, too. Something may be stuck in the throat or there may be an infection. Always tell the doctor if your child is wheezing.)

Asthma symptoms come and go. An asthma “attack” can be big or small. Asthma can get worse when your child is upset or worried. But it's a real physical problem. Asthma runs in families. Children who have eczema or hay fever often have asthma, too. Asthma may be more common in children who live in houses with pets and tobacco smoke.

## Asthma attacks can be triggered by:

- Colds, flu, and other infections in the throat and lungs
- Breathing pollen from plants, mold, animal dander, dust, or smoke
- Sulfites, which are substances added to some foods
- Taking some medicines, like aspirin
- Breathing cold air
- Exercising too hard
- Getting upset, angry, or “stressed out”



## TREATMENT

A doctor should treat asthma.

The right asthma treatment depends on how bad the attacks are. It's hard to treat asthma with medicines you buy without a prescription. Work with your doctor to develop an asthma action plan to take medications safely, avoid asthma triggers and monitor symptoms. The doctor may prescribe one or more medicines for your child's asthma. Some kinds of medicines are to take during an asthma attack. These are called reliever or rescue medications. Other kinds are taken daily or as prescribed to help prevent asthma attacks. These are called maintenance medications. Combining maintenance and relieving medications into one inhaler can provide better asthma control and less need for emergency medical treatment.

## Medicines include:

- Bronchodilators and steroids. These drugs open up the airways in the body for quick relief. They come either as a spray you inhale or something you swallow.
- Longer-acting drugs to decrease chronic swelling of the airways to help reduce symptom frequency and severity. They come either as a spray, or as pills you swallow.
- Peak flow meter. This is a device to monitor your child's asthma at home.
- Flu vaccine. This is given once a year.
- Pneumonia vaccine. This is given at different ages. Talk to your doctor about when to have it.



## TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Does your child have any of these problems?

- Blue color around the lips
- Have a fast heartbeat
- Seem drowsy or confused
- Has to sit up to breathe
- Can't talk or make normal sounds
- Has very noisy, grunting sounds with breathing

**NO** **YES** ➔ **GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE**



Is your child wheezing a lot? Does your child's chest feel tight? Is it hard for your child to breathe?

**NO** **YES** ➔ **GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE**



With asthma, does your child have a fever or a cold? Or is he or she coughing up green, yellow, or bloody-colored mucus?

**NO** **YES** ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**



Does your child's asthma attack stay just as bad, no matter what you do for it?

**NO** **YES** ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**



Are your child's asthma attacks coming more often or getting worse?

**NO** **YES** ➔ **SEE DOCTOR**



Has a child who does not have asthma had a cough for more than 1 week and he or she was not sick with a cold or other problem?

**NO** **YES** ➔ **CALL DOCTOR**



**USE SELF-CARE**

## SELF-CARE

- Don't smoke or let your child smoke. Don't allow smoking in the house.
- Have your child drink a lot of water, juice, and other fluids. (Ask your child's doctor how much fluid your child should have each day.)
- Find out what triggers your child's asthma.
- If you don't have a dog, cat, or other pet, don't get one. If you have a pet, keep it outside if you can. If not, don't let it in your child's bedroom.
- Have your child sleep with the kind of pillow the doctor says is O.K.
- Cover your child's mattress and pillow with a cover that says allergen-free. Wash mattress pads in hot water every week.
- Use throw rugs that can be washed often instead of carpets. Pollen, pet dander, mold, and dust mites collect in carpets. Use blinds and curtains that can be washed often, too.
- Try not to have stuffed animals kept in your child's bedroom. Or have only one that can be washed. Wash it in hot water once a week.
- If you can, use a vacuum with a HEPA filter and double-thickness bags. When you vacuum, have your child wear a filter mask over the nose and mouth.
- Use air filters with your furnace and air-conditioning unit. Or use portable air cleaners to keep the air clean. Change or wash filters often. Use distilled (not tap) water in humidifiers and vaporizers.



- It's good for your child to do sports like baseball. But tell your child to stop exercising if he or she starts to wheeze.
- Don't hang sheets and blankets outside to dry. Pollen can get on them.
- When outdoors in cold weather, have your child wear a scarf around his or her mouth and nose. The scarf warms the air before your child breathes it in.
- Don't let your child eat foods or medicines that have sulfites. Shellfish, for example, often have sulfites. They bother many people with asthma.
- Have your child sit up during an asthma attack. Don't let your child lie down.
- Don't run out of your child's asthma medicine. Keep the medicine handy. Have your child take it as soon as he or she starts to feel an attack.
- Don't give your child aspirin! Some people with asthma are allergic to aspirin. Use acetaminophen instead.

(**Note:** Aspirin and other medicines that have salicylates have been linked to Reye's Syndrome, a condition that can kill.)