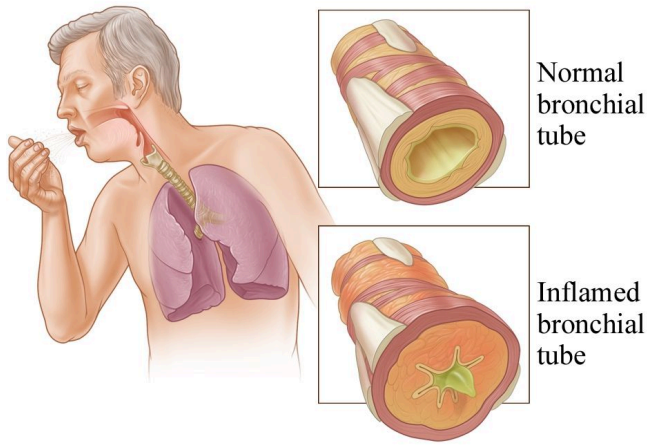


# Asthma in Teens and Adults



Asthma often starts when you are a child or teen, or you may get it as an adult. Symptoms can range from mild to severe. You may have attacks often or only now and then. Things in your environment such as smoke, pollen, mold, or cold air may trigger your asthma attacks. Other triggers include pet dander and dust mites.

Asthma causes swelling and irritation in your airways. It can make airway muscles tighten, making it hard for you to breathe. This is called an acute asthma episode, or an asthma attack. Asthma attacks may happen every now and then, or in severe cases, every day. Symptoms may slowly get worse over time.

Asthma can make lung and airway infections like bronchitis and pneumonia worse.

Even mild asthma may cause long-term changes to your airways and lung problems.

## What are the symptoms?

- You wheeze, making a loud or soft whistling noise when you breathe in and out.
- You cough a lot. This is the only symptom for some people.

- Your chest feels tight.
- You feel short of breath. You may have rapid, shallow breathing or trouble breathing.
- You have trouble sleeping because you're coughing or having a hard time breathing.
- You quickly get tired during exercise.

Symptoms may start soon after you're around things (triggers) that cause your asthma attacks. This is an early phase response. Or they may start several hours after exposure (late phase response). A late phase response can make it harder to figure out what triggers your symptoms.

Symptoms can be mild or severe. You may have symptoms daily or just now and then. Or you may have something in between.

Some people have symptoms, such as a cough or shortness of breath, that get worse at night.

## How is it treated?

Asthma is treated with self-care and medicine to help you breathe easier.

Medicines used to treat asthma include:

- **Controller medicines.** These medicines prevent asthma attacks, stop problems before they happen, and reduce inflammation in your lungs. These things help you control your asthma.
- **Quick-relief medicines.** These medicines are used when you can't prevent symptoms and need to treat them fast.
- **Oral or injected corticosteroids (systemic corticosteroids).** These medicines may be used to treat asthma attacks.

Treatment also includes things you can do to control your symptoms, like avoiding your triggers and following your asthma action plan.

## Exams and tests

Along with doing a physical exam and asking you questions, your doctor may order lung function tests.

These tests include:

- **Spirometry.** Doctors use this test to diagnose and monitor asthma. It measures how quickly you can move air in and out of your lungs and how much air you move.
- **Peak expiratory flow (PEF).** This shows how much air you can quickly exhale when you try your hardest.
- **An exercise or inhalation challenge.** This measures how well you can breathe after exercise or after taking a medicine.

## When to call a doctor

**Call 911** right away if:

- You are having severe trouble breathing.

**Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care** if:

- Your symptoms do not get better after you have followed your asthma action plan.
- You have new or worse trouble breathing.
- You cough up dark brown or bloody mucus (sputum).
- You have a new or higher fever.

**Call your doctor** if:

- Your coughing or wheezing gets worse.
- You need to use quick-relief medicine on more than 2 days a week within a month (unless it is just for exercise).
- You cough more deeply or more often, especially if you notice more mucus or a change in the color of your mucus.
- You want help figuring out what is triggering your asthma attacks.

If you have not been diagnosed with asthma but have mild asthma symptoms, call your doctor and make an appointment for an evaluation.