

Asthma Overview

What is asthma?

Asthma is a disease that affects the lungs. It can last a lifetime. Even if asthma symptoms are not active, asthma is still there. There is no cure for asthma, but there are many things that can be done to help control it.

It is important to keep asthma in good control. When asthma is in good control the lungs are healthy and breathing is easier. With good control there will be:

- Fewer asthma symptoms
- Fewer missed school or work days
- Fewer visits to the emergency room
- The ability to be more active

How does asthma affect the lungs?

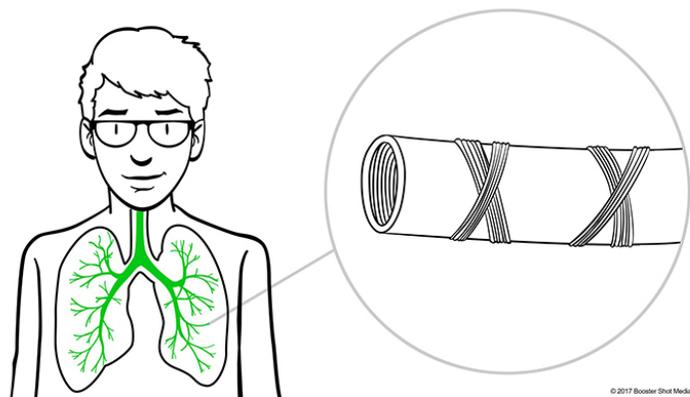
The lungs are made up of many tiny airways. The airways carry air in and out of the lungs.

When an asthma attack happens:

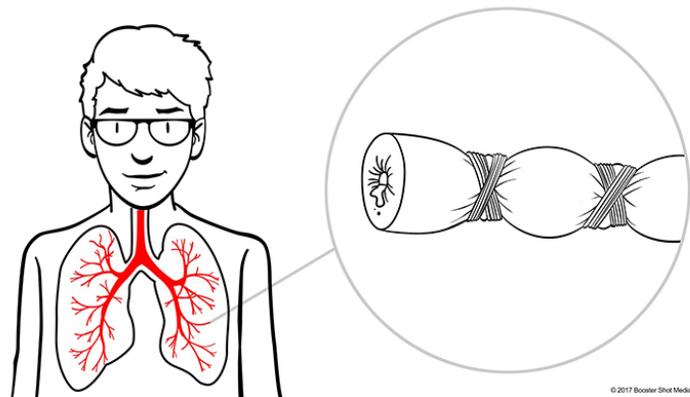
- The airways become swollen
- The airways make more mucous
- Muscles around the airways squeeze tight

What are the signs and symptoms of asthma?

When asthma begins to flare or act up, it is harder to breathe. You may start to cough or wheeze, or your chest may feel tight. These symptoms may get worse. This is often called an asthma attack.



Normal airway: Air moves freely and breathing is easy



Asthma airway: Air not moving freely and breathing is hard

What can cause asthma symptoms or make symptoms worse?

Triggers are things that can cause asthma symptoms or make symptoms worse. Triggers can be things like smoke, allergies, illness, or strong smells. Avoiding triggers can reduce the chance of an asthma attack and may decrease the need for more medicine.

How do asthma medicines help?

Asthma medicines help the lungs stay healthy. There are two main types of asthma medicine:

- **Controller medicine.** This medicine helps decrease the swelling in the airways. It works slowly and needs to be taken every day.
- **Rescue medicine.** This medicine helps relax the muscles around the airway. It works quickly and should be taken when asthma symptoms occur. Sometimes your doctor will recommend taking the medicine before gym class, activity or exercise.

How are asthma medicines given?

Most asthma medicines need to get into the lungs to work. There are several ways to get asthma medicine to the lungs:

1. Metered Dose Inhaler (inhaler or pump)
2. Dry Powdered Inhaler
3. Nebulizer
4. Liquids or pills taken by mouth



Special tools or devices are used to help get asthma medicine into the lungs.

- **Spacers** are used with metered dose inhalers. It helps slow down the speed of the medicine so it can get into the lungs and not to other parts of the body.
- **Nebulizers** turn liquid medicine into a mist that can be breathed into the lungs.

What is an asthma management plan?

An asthma management plan is a special plan the health care team will make with you. This plan tells you what to do when your breathing is good and what to do when asthma flares up or acts up.

You are a very important part of the health care team. Together with the help of the team, asthma can be controlled.