

# Signs and Symptoms of an Asthma Attack

An asthma flare-up (attack) is when signs of asthma gets worse.

There are **early signs** and **emergency signs** of an asthma attack. It is important to start quick relief medicine (rescue) medicine as soon as early signs begin.

These **early signs** are:

- Cough
- Wheeze
- Tight or heavy chest
- Cough at night
- Playing less

Follow your asthma management plan for which medicines to use. If medicine is not started the asthma attack could get more severe.

If Emergency signs start, call your doctor or go to the urgent care/emergency room right away.

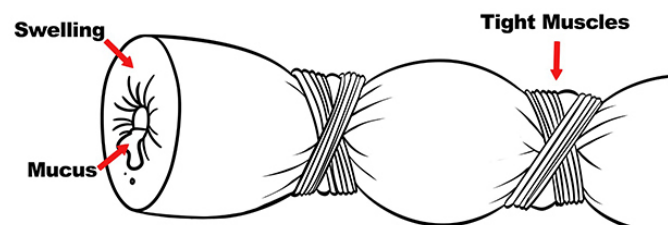
These **emergency signs** are:

- Rescue medicine is not working.
- Breathing is faster or harder and keeps getting worse.
- Nose opens wider (flares).
- The skin between the ribs pulls in. This is called retractions.
- Trouble walking, talking, or sleeping
- Coughing without stopping

## What happens during an asthma attack?

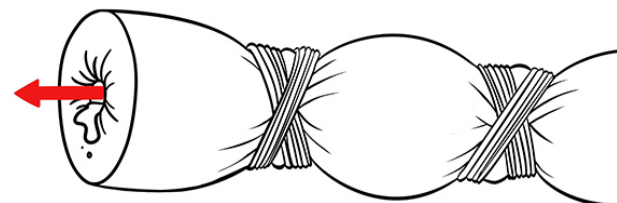
During an asthma flare-up or attack, three things get worse in the airways inside the lungs:

- The airways become swollen. The walls thicken and make the airways smaller.
- The airways make more mucous. Mucous is a thick liquid that your body makes. Mucous normally protects the nose, throat, and airways. When you have asthma, your body makes too much mucous. This mucous can plug the airways.
- Muscles around the airways squeeze tight. Your airways have muscles around them that are usually loose. When you have asthma, these muscles can tighten.



Airway during asthma attack has swelling, mucus, and tight muscles

These three things all make the airways the airways smaller, which are what causes wheezing, more coughing, and trouble breathing.

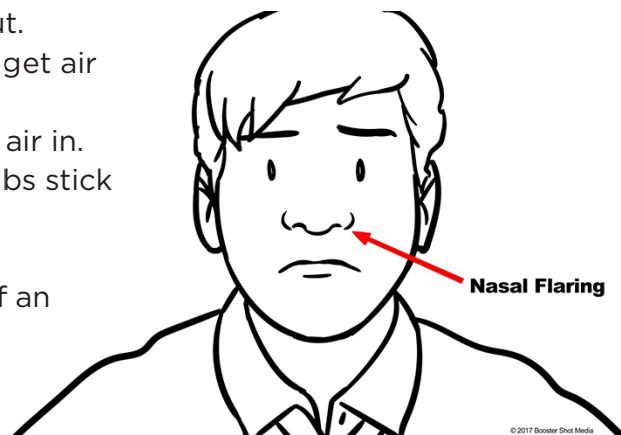


Airway during asthma attack: Air not moving freely and breathing is hard

The body is working hard to get air in and out. There are signs when the body is working to get air in and out:

- The nose opens wider (flares) to get more air in.
- The skin between the ribs pulls in, so the ribs stick out. This is called retractions.

There are early signs and emergency signs of an asthma attack. It is important to start quick relief medicine (rescue) medicine as soon as early signs begin. Follow your asthma management plan. If medicine is not started the asthma attack could get more severe.



Nose flares to get more air in during asthma attack

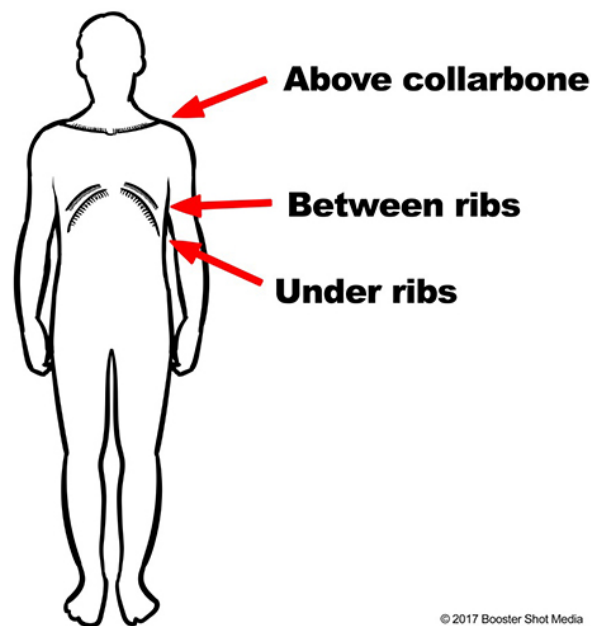
### Why do asthma attacks happen?

Often something triggers an asthma attack such as:

- Colds
- Allergies
- Something around you (cleaners, animals, dust, mold, or weather changes)
- Cigarette smoke
- Exercise

### Treatment of an asthma attack

- **Use your quick relief (rescue) medicine (albuterol or levalbuterol).**
- Follow your asthma management plan.
- If symptoms don't get better and you are still having severe symptoms, call your doctor or go to urgent care or the emergency room.
- After seeing the doctor, a stronger medicine may be needed.



Skin around the ribs pulls in during an asthma emergency

Your doctor will help you get good control of your asthma. With good control, asthma attacks do not happen often.