



Understanding Asthma



What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic condition that affects the lungs and causes breathing problems. Breathing problems happen when the airways in the lungs become swollen, irritated, smaller, and filled with mucus. This makes it harder for air to move through the lungs as normal.

What causes asthma?

It is not known exactly what causes asthma: It is a combination of environmental factors and your genes. Being exposed to things in your environment such as mold, dust mites, or tobacco smoke may cause asthma.

What are the signs and symptoms of asthma?

- Trouble breathing
- Chest tightness
- Fast heartbeat
- Coughing
- Chest tightness

What is an asthma trigger?

Triggers are things that can irritate the airway and cause symptoms of asthma. These include: cigarette smoke, allergens (dust mites, pollen, pet hair), dirty air, exercise, and respiratory infections like the cold and flu.

How is asthma diagnosed?

Your child's provider will ask many questions about previous health history, any problems breathing normally, and any history in the family. The provider will also ask about things your child may be allergic to and any contact with things that make breathing harder for your child. The provider will then perform a physical exam of asthma and a breathing test called spirometry, to find out how well your child's lungs are working.

How is asthma treated?

Your child's asthma symptoms can be managed by following two important instructions: avoid triggers and take medication as prescribed.

Avoid triggers: Once your child's asthma triggers are identified, the medical team will work with you to help you avoid them. Some things you can do to avoid common triggers include: washing your sheets and vacuuming often, keeping the family pet outdoors, and avoiding areas with high pollen measurements. Another important thing you can do to help prevent asthma symptoms for your child is to make sure they get their annual flu shot!

Take medication as prescribed: It is important to take your medication exactly as your provider has prescribed for you. Not all patients take the same medications, so make sure that you know how to take the medication your provider has prescribed. There are two types of asthma medications: quick relief and long-term control. Some children will need both medications while others will only need one or the other. Your quick relief and controller medications may be the same, but your provider will tell you how and why you might take it differently.

- a. Quick relief medicines act fast to open up the airway to allow for increased air to get in and out of the lungs. The effect of this medication starts shortly after taking it but does not last long.
- b. Long-term control medicines manage asthma by preventing the start of symptoms. These medications must be taken every day, even when your child is not having symptoms.