

*Su Familia*

*The National Hispanic  
Family Health Helpline*

**1-866-783-2645**

SuFamilia@hispanichealth.org

# Asthma

## What is asthma?

Asthma is a respiratory disease that causes the airways in your lungs to become swollen, narrowed, or blocked. This alters the normal flow of air in and out of the lungs, which can make it difficult to breathe. Asthma affects an estimated 20.5 million people in the United States. It is the most common chronic childhood disease and a leading cause of childhood disability.

## What is an asthma attack?

An asthma attack is an acute period of chest tightness, wheezing, coughing, problems sleeping, and/or shortness of breath. Any one or more of these symptoms can indicate an attack. Persons with asthma may have mild, moderate, or severe breathing difficulty if not treated properly. Since severe attacks can be life threatening, it is important that you recognize the symptoms and properly assess the severity of those symptoms. Typically, symptom-free periods alternate with periods of acute symptoms (asthma attacks).

## What are the symptoms of an asthma attack?

- You may have one or all of these symptoms during an asthma attack:
- Coughing while or after exercising.
- Wheezing (a whistling noise when air passes in and out of the airway).
- Chest tightness.
- Shortness of breath.

## What can trigger an asthma attack?

An "asthma trigger" is a substance that may cause an asthma attack. These substances, or allergens can be found both indoors and outdoors. Exposure to them can cause the airways in your lungs to swell, triggering any of the symptoms of an asthma attack.

Some common asthma triggers are:

- Tobacco smoke and second-hand smoke.
- Smog, ozone, pollen, and other types of poor air quality.
- Natural gas, kerosene, or propane.
- Smoke (coal, wood burning).
- Paint fumes (sprays, strong odors).

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### Allergens:

- Animal dander (pet or animal hair, saliva, or urine), house dust mites, and cockroach droppings.
- Mold or yeast spores.
- Certain common medications (check with your health care provider).
- Foods, food additives, preservatives, and colorings.

### Other:

- Viral infections in the respiratory tract.
- Workplace contaminants.
- Emotional stress/anxiety.

## Is it possible to prevent asthma?

Asthma is a serious chronic disease that can be controlled but not cured or prevented. It is important to be aware of your symptoms and what triggers an attack. Learning to monitor changes in the environment (such as pollen count, ozone safety alerts, and severe weather changes) is important for controlling your asthma. An effective management plan requires avoiding triggers, taking the appropriate medications to prevent symptoms, and working closely with your health care provider.

## How is asthma treated?

Asthma can be diagnosed after a detailed medical history and physical examination. Your health care provider can perform a test, called a Spirometry, to determine the amount of the blockage of airflow. You and your health care provider can then develop an individualized plan to help identify the correct medications, treatment, and procedures for controlling your condition.

Two types of medication are used to control asthma. Quick-relief medications, such as inhalers and other anti-inflammatory drugs, provide prompt relief of the acute symptoms seen in asthma attacks. Long-term preventive care includes inhaled, injected, or oral medications that are taken daily to help prevent symptoms.

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## **Asthma**

### **Resources**

#### **National Alliance for Hispanic Health**

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<http://www.hispanichealth.org>

#### **American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology**

<http://www.aaaai.org>

#### **American Lung Association**

1-800-548-8252

<http://www.lungusa.org/asthma/>

#### **Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America**

1-800-727-8462

<http://www.aafa.org>

#### **Environmental Protection Agency**

1-800-438-4318

<http://www.epa.gov>

#### **National Asthma Education and Prevention Program**

**National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute**

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/about/naepp/index.htm>

#### **National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases**

<http://www3.niaid.nih.gov/>

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