

WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is a disease affecting the airways that carry air to and from your lungs. People who suffer from this chronic condition (long-lasting or recurrent) are said to be asthmatic.

The airway walls of an asthmatic are swollen or inflamed. When exposed to certain stimuli their airways can narrow, making it harder to breathe. This airflow obstruction is reversible either spontaneously or with treatment. There are 3 main mechanisms for airway narrowing:

1. The inside lining of the airways can become red and swollen (inflammation)
2. Extra mucous can be produced
3. The muscle around the airways tightens (bronchoconstriction)

As inflammation causes the airways to become narrower, less air can pass through them (both to and from the lungs).

SYMPTOMS OF ASTHMA

Symptoms of the narrowing include wheezing (a hissing sound while breathing), chest tightness, breathing problems and coughing. Asthmatics usually experience these symptoms most frequently during the night and the early morning.

WHAT ARE SOME TRIGGERS OF ASTHMA?

- Colds and flu
- Exposure to cigarette smoke
- Exercise/activity
- Inhaled allergens (e.g. pollens, moulds, animal dander and dust mites)
- Environmental (e.g. dust, pollution, wood smoke, bush fires)
- Changes in temperature and weather
- Certain medications (e.g. aspirin)
- Chemicals and strong smells (e.g. perfumes, cleaners)
- Emotional factors (e.g. laughter, stress)

ASTHMA TREATMENTS

Although Asthma cannot be cured, it can be treated and kept under control so that you can live a normal, active life.

Asthma medications fall into 2 categories, relievers and preventers:

RELIEVERS

Inhaled medications:

- Airomir ®
- Asmol®
- Bricanyl®
- Ventolin (blue) ®

Relievers provide relief from asthma symptoms very quickly. They relax the muscles around the airways for up to four hours, allowing air to more easily move through the airways.

Reliever inhalers are the ones to use in an asthma emergency.

PREVENTERS

Inhaled medications:

- Flixotide (orange) ®
- Intal Forte (white) ®
- Pulmicort, Qvar (brown) ®
- Tilade (yellow) ®
- Alvesco®

Oral medication:

- Singulair®

Preventers reduce the redness and swelling inside the airways and help to dry up mucus. They may take a few weeks to make people feel better. Preventers must be taken daily to keep you well, reduce the risk of asthma attacks and to prevent lung damage.