

# Asthma

Asthma is a disease in which the airways into your lungs become narrow and produce mucus. When this happens, it is hard to breathe. Some things that can trigger an asthma attack include allergies, cold viruses, medicines, dusts, chemicals, exercise or emotions.

## Signs

- Breathing faster than normal or trouble breathing
- Wheezing or noisy breathing
- Coughing that may be worse at night or early in the morning
- Feeling tight in the chest
- Having a fast heartbeat
- Having head congestion
- Having a itchy, scratchy or sore throat
- Being tired
- If your doctor ordered a peak flow meter, having a drop in peak flow meter readings

You may have more signs of asthma if you:

- Have allergies
- Have a family member with asthma
- Are sensitive to air pollution
- Are exposed to smoke
- Have stress

## **Your Care**

Your care may include:

- Taking different medicines to:
  - ▶ Open airways
  - ▶ Decrease your body's response to allergens
  - ▶ Decrease the swelling of your airways
  - ▶ Decrease congestion
- Finding out what causes your signs.
- Allergy testing.
- Using a peak flow meter to check and prevent asthma attacks.
- Drinking a large glass of liquid every 1 to 2 hours. This helps keep your mucus thin. Thin mucus is easier for you to cough up and decreases the swelling in your lungs. Clear liquids are best, such as water, fruit juice, tea, broth and clear soups.
- Avoiding milk products when wheezing because they can thicken your mucus.

## **To Prevent Asthma Attacks**

- Keep asthma medicine with you at all times. Take your scheduled medicines even if your signs go away.
- Avoid cigarette, pipe and cigar smoke.
- Stay away from foods, medicines or things that cause you to have signs of asthma. These are called triggers.
- Avoid contact with people who have a cold or flu.
- Rest and drink plenty of liquids at the first sign of a cold.
- Breathe through a scarf or other covering in cold weather.
- Talk to your doctor about an exercise to strengthen your lungs.
- Reduce stress.

**Call your doctor right away if you:**

- Have a cough, are wheezing or are having trouble breathing.
- Feel you need to take more medicine than your doctor has ordered.
- Have a temperature over 100.5 degrees F or 38 degrees C.
- Have mucus that is not white or clear, or mucus that is too thick to cough up.
- Have problems caused by your medicine such as shakiness, confusion, nervousness, upset stomach or a bad taste.
- Are not able to do your normal activities or exercise.

**Call 911 right away if you have:**

- Severe wheezing, trouble breathing or coughing.
- Chest pain.
- Lips or fingernails that are gray or blue.

**Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions or concerns.**