

# Asthma

## What is it?

Asthma is a chronic lung disease characterized by three airway problems — inflammation, obstruction, and hyper-responsiveness. It most often affects people aged 5 to 17, or over the age of 65, those who also suffer from allergies, and those who live in urban areas.

## Symptoms

Asthma symptoms and their severity will vary from patient to patient, but may include a combination of the following:

- ✓ Difficulty breathing, or pain when breathing
- ✓ Wheezing or coughing during physical activity
- ✓ A persistent, chronic night-time cough

## Diagnosis

Because the symptoms of asthma often mimic other ailments, such as emphysema or bronchitis, it is important to consult your physician for a diagnosis. In addition to listening carefully to your symptoms, and asking questions, your physician will likely perform imaging and/or lab tests to make a diagnosis. These tests may include a combination of the following, and may be repeated to gauge the effectiveness of various treatments:

- ✓ Spirometry: the patient breathes into a spirometer, which measures how much and how well the patient's lung receive and hold air, and to detect any airway restriction or obstruction.
- ✓ Peak Flow Monitoring: this test measures how quickly the patient can exhale, or breathe air out of the lungs.
- ✓ Blood test: a vial of the patient's blood is drawn and analyzed to check levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide
- ✓ Chest X-ray

Again, your physician may want to perform these tests once an asthma diagnosis has been made, and a treatment plan started, to evaluate the effectiveness of the treatment.

## Treatments

Today, there is no cure for asthma, though there are several options for effective treatment to relieve and manage asthma symptoms.



Because asthma is a chronic disease, it is important that patients follow their individual treatment plan, even when they are not experiencing symptoms. Components of a successful treatment plan will include:

- ✓ Identifying and avoiding asthma episode triggers
- ✓ Medication therapy to alleviate or relieve asthma symptoms
- ✓ Patient self-monitoring and education, so the patient can identify when their symptoms are worsening
- ✓ Physician testing and monitoring to track the progress and effectiveness of the asthma treatment plan

It may be necessary to alter the components of a treatment plan several times before an effective, successful plan is found.

## Helpful Hints

- ✓ If there is a change in your symptoms, or in the frequency or severity of your symptoms, please let your physician know right away.
- ✓ If you're unclear about a test, diagnosis, or any part of your treatment plan, please ask your physician. The more you know, the more successful your treatment plan will be!

### Brought to you by the caring physicians at:

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