

The symptoms of asthma



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Asthma is a chronic (long-term) disease that inflames and narrows the airways. The airways produce extra mucus and breathing becomes difficult. Asthma causes tightness in the chest, shortness of breath, wheezing and coughing. Asthma affects people of all ages but usually starts in childhood. For some people asthma may just be a minor inconvenience for others it is a major problem that interferes with daily activities. Those that have severe asthma could incur a life threatening asthma attack.

The symptoms of asthma range from person to person and vary from minor to severe. A person may have symptoms primarily at night, during exercise or when they may be exposed to certain triggers. Some people have asthma symptoms all the time others may have infrequent attacks and between flare-ups feel completely normal and have no trouble breathing. Situations that may induce an asthma flare up are: Exercise-induced asthma occurs during exercise and may be worse when the air is cold and dry, Occupational asthma is caused by breathing irritants such as chemical fumes, gases or dust, Allergy-induced asthma is triggered by particular allergens, such as pollen, molds and pet dander.

Asthma is a very common disease. Twenty-two million Americans suffer from asthma, of that six million are children and the number of people being diagnosed grows each year. Factors that may increase your chance of developing asthma are: Having a blood relative (parent or sibling) with asthma, being overweight, being a smoker or exposure to second hand smoke, mother that smoked while being pregnant, low birth weight, exposure to exhaust fumes and other pollutants such as chemicals used in farming/harvesting and manufacturing. Having an allergic condition such as

allergic rhinitis (hay fever) or atopic dermatitis can also be a factor in having asthma. Other causes or risk factors may be exposure to allergens, certain germs or having some types of bacterial or viral infections. Research on these triggers is required to find out what role they play in developing asthma.

Diagnosis of asthma can be difficult. In order to rule out any other conditions such as wheezy bronchitis, pneumonia or reactive airway disease, a doctor can perform a physical exam and ask you questions about your signs and symptoms. Lung (pulmonary) function tests can determine how much air you move in and out of your lungs. Several tests include: A Peak flow meter which measures how hard you can breathe out, Spirometry a test that measures the narrowing of your bronchial tubes by checking the amount of air exhaled after a deep breath and how fast you can breathe out. Other tests that can be done after your initial lung function test is normal are Methacholine challenge and Nitric oxide test.

Asthma is an incurable disease that can be controlled by medication. The right medications depend on a number of things, including your age, your symptoms, your asthma triggers and what works best for an individual to keep it under control. Treatment usually involves learning to recognize the triggers and taking steps to avoid them, and tracking your breathing. Prevention and long -term control is the key to preventing asthma attacks.