

The american lung association



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Imagine if you could not accomplish these basic activities without a great effort. Suddenly, it becomes harder to breath, you get a tight feeling in your chest and can't catch your breath no matter how hard you try- and suddenly all these simple tasks seem like finishing a marathon. While problems with breathing may seem like a horrifying and worrying episode to many, it is a common reality that many people suffering from asthma have already become used to, and is only increasing in numbers. Asthma, described by The American Lung Association, is “ a condition in which your airways narrow and swell and produce extra mucus, [which] can make breathing difficult and trigger coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath” (American Lung Association), affects around 22 million Americans to date, and provides a major obstacle in maintaining the quality of a normal life. According to a statistic provided by the Los Angeles Times, the rate of Americans affected with asthma went from 7. % in 2001 to 8. 4% in 201 0, or in numbers, about 200, 000 new cases over the course of 10 years.

Although developed nations have come a long way providing cures and remedies to help battle chronic diseases, not much is known about finding a cure for asthma, which is why it continues to be one of the biggest health conditions being faced today. As with many growing diseases, asthma has noticeable symptoms that should signal a problem, and can cause a major change in any person's normal lifestyle. Although symptoms of asthma can be different for anyone, the most common signs are usually cough nib wheezing, chest tightness, and shortness of breath, and are most often triggered by allergens from dust or pollen, irritants such as smoke or air-pollution, and exercise. Not only are the regular symptoms persistent and

bothering to many, but they can also affect the person's overall quality of life.

For instance, many people suffering from asthma feel as if it is holding them back from being able to do normal activities that other people not affected by the disease can do. Playing sports and getting the body much-needed exercise can become a big challenge for people with asthma, and many who try to get involved in athletics feel as if they can't keep up with everyone else because of their constant breathing problems. Even when avoiding exercise and taking it easy, symptoms of asthma can still add complications to a person's life. Many people with asthma are often bothered by severe coughing, most commonly in the morning or at night, making it harder to fall asleep. Going outside can also be stressful for many asthma patients, since there are many environmental factors outside that can trigger an asthma attack. Any asthma attack triggered by any environmental factors can be severe enough to send a victim to the hospital, as asthma is responsible for about 500, 000 hospitalizations per year (National Institute of Health). In the most severe cases, asthma symptoms can even be fatal, as the National Institute of Health reports that asthma attacks and complications lead to about 4500 deaths per year (NINA). Since the rates of asthma in the United States are steadily increasing, more and more days are being lost to the uncontrollable symptoms of the disease, holding the patients back and preventing them from living an ideal life.

As we work on finding a cure or simply trying to help the symptoms of asthma, it is important to know who the disease is mainly affecting.

According to the National Institute of Health, around 7 million of the 22

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million cases in the United States are of children, and most cases of asthma in adults started in their childhood. The website has also stated that asthma is more common in young boys than girls, although in adulthood, asthma is more common in women than men. Since most adults still suffering from asthma started as kids, and a big percentage of people afflicted with asthma are still children, the disease can be considered a much bigger problem for children. Since children are weaker and more vulnerable to diseases, in comparison to adults, the symptoms of asthma can be more difficult for them to handle, and can place bigger obstacles in their development.

Children with asthma are often stunted physically, socially, and mentally. The constant implications with breathing and wheezing episodes can make their physical education in school much more difficult, and children with asthma may have to be excused from the physical aspects of school.

Because of their difficulties with playing sports and keeping up with the other kids, children with asthma may also have a harder time achieving a rounded social life, due to their constant fear of experiencing a wheezing episode or an asthma flare. When children aren't able to meet their physical expectations and spend enough time with other kids, they can also develop many mental and emotional problems, mostly concerning a lack of confidence and a low self-esteem.

Since there is currently no cure for asthma, more and more children continue to suffer the effects of this disease. According to the American Lung Association, "asthma is the third leading cause of hospitalizing among children under the age of 15," and in 2009, "there were approximately 774,000 emergency room visits due to asthma in those under 15" (ALA). Asthma
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may also be affecting children's education, due to asthma being Of the leading causes for children missing school. As stated by the previous article by the American Lung Association, in 2009, " asthma accounted for estimated 14. 4 million lost school days in children with an asthma attack" (ALA).

Children with asthma are mostly taught to control their symptoms medications and the use of inhalers, and also have to avoid many activities and environments that would trigger an asthma attack. Due to the persistence of asthma and the major symptoms that comes with it, many children may feel as if their life revolves around asthma, proving the seriousness of this common disease that is often overlooked by the public While it is essential to know who a disease is mostly affecting, whether problem with a certain age group or gender demographic, it is also import to consider where the disease is most prominent. Although asthma is see a universal disease that can affect someone anywhere, recent statistics CE point out that rates of asthma are significantly stronger in western country than in Eastern, African, or South American countries. According to resear conducted by the Global Initiative for Asthma, also known as GINA, rates asthma prove to be stronger in Western countries, with the highest reapportions being more than 15% of the population in countries such as England, Scotland, Australia, and New Zealand, while compared to less the 3% Of the population in Eastern countries such as Indonesia, India, and CLC Because of these statistics, the GINA believes that the rate of asthma increases as countries become more westernizes, and estimated that " Wi the projected increase in the proportion of the world's population that is

urban from 45% to 59% in 2025, there is likely to be an increased number of asthmatics worldwide over the next two decades” (GINA). If these statistics turn out to be true, then it is possible that there may be 100 million more people worldwide affected by asthma by 2025. Because western countries tend to be more developed than eastern countries, many believe the high rates of asthma in the western world can be linked to the higher rate of urbanization. Since the developed parts of the world should be more advanced when it comes to medicine and preventing illnesses, then why is it a much bigger problem in the highly developed western world? Even though it may be hard to understand why, the reason for this could very well be that because they are more developed. As the western world has become more and more industrialized and urbanized over the past decades, the rates of asthma have also increased, showing the link between urban civilizations and high rates of asthma occurrence.

By finding out who asthma affects and where it is most popular, we can learn more about where the disease area comes from, and how to prevent it from happening. Although the questions of what asthma is, what it does, and who it affects have provided great details about the disease, there is still one major question left: Where does asthma come from? As stated previously, asthma is rising in numbers, mainly in urban areas, which could provide clues as to how people get this disease. Although the exact cause of asthma has yet to be discovered, many believe the disease can be blamed on three factors: genetics, environment, and hygiene. According to WebMD, asthma can indeed be an inherited disease, and people with a parent who has asthma are 3 to 6 times more likely to develop asthma than someone with

non-asthmatic parents (WebMD). According to the same website, up to of all asthma patients have a family history of asthma, giving more liability to the fact that it could be a hereditary disease. Because of asthma's tendency to have a higher rate in certain areas of the world, particularly western countries, many also believe asthma to be a result of environmental factors. According to the World Health Organization, around 44% of the asthma burden is due to the environment, with these factors including both indoor and outdoor exposures (Press-Stun).

The most common outdoor exposures that can lead to the development of asthma include pollution, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, cold temperatures, and high humidity, while the most common indoor exposures would include dampness, dust mites, and fungal allergens. Of all the supposed factors for asthma development, the most interesting one is the link between hygiene and asthma, known by many as the 'The Hygiene Hypothesis.' This theory mainly draws back to the Western lifestyle, and our overstressed importance on sanitation and hygiene, which causes a change in our living conditions. Because of this increased sanitation, children are no longer prone to the same environment and infections that were prominent years ago, which affects how the child's immune system would develop.

This difficulty placed on children can increase their risk of developing asthma, and aka it more difficult for them to live in conditions with asthma triggers and allergens. Even without knowing the exact cause of asthma, knowing what can trigger it can lead us closer to finding out how to combat the disease. By understanding how asthma affects people, and determining the factors that influence the prominence of the disease, we can better

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understand how to tackle asthma, and what we can do to help relieve the burden of the chronic disease. Most people with asthma learn to control their symptoms by following an organized asthma action plan, which would mainly provide them with the right treatments and lifestyle changes in order to live life as normally as possible. Doctors, to fit the condition of the asthma patient, usually prescribe a medication, and the type of medication and dosage can vary depending on the severity of the disease. Medications are usually taken through a device called an inhaler, which allows the medicine to go to the lungs, although it can sometimes be taken in a pill form. Using an inhaler is said by asthmatics to be an unpleasant daily routine, describing the taste as bitter, and was described by an asthma patient in an interview as comparable to 'that taste you get from drinking orange juice right after tooth brushing' (Barron). Along with medications, asthmatics are also advised to acquire different changes in their lifestyle and habits, in order to avoid anything that might trigger an asthma attack, which can include exercise, different environments that might include allergens, second-hand smoke, and any dusty or humid areas.

For those with long-term asthma whose lives are more impacted by the disease, several approaches are recommended to keep the symptoms under control. For example, doctors recommend asthma patients to track their asthma and record their symptoms, in order to determine if the treatments are keeping asthma symptoms well under control or if the patient would need medical help. It is also advised that asthma patients visit their doctor every 2 to 6 weeks for a regular asthma check-up, mostly to determine if they are making any progress with the treatments, and so the doctor can

assess the level of asthma control. If the control amount is sufficient, then less medicine may be required, since the goal is to be on as little medicine as possible. As the recent rates of asthma in the United States are the highest they've ever been, and since the disease is only continuing to become more dominant in the Western world, there are still questions left to ask about the future of asthma: What is being done to reduce the rates of asthma, and will we ever see the decline of this disease? As of now, there is no way to cure asthma, and other than genetics, no possible way to determine who is going to get asthma. But by learning more about what causes asthma and how to treat it and control the symptoms, we can step closer to learning how to eventually prevent the disease from occurring among future generations. By now, we know that asthma can mostly be caused by genetics and environmental factors, such as pollution and humidity.

By observing how often these environmental factors can lead to asthma, and how they affect people who are struggling with asthma, we can work on improving the status of the environment, which can eventually slow down the increasing rates of asthma. Since asthma mostly affects children, and starts in childhood for most adult patients, schools can also take a bigger approach to help be more cautious of their own environment, and make sure that there are no possible triggers around the campus, and that all children affected with asthma can have an emergency treatment in case of an asthma flare. Because asthma attacks seem to be the main reason why kids have to miss school because of their symptoms, it would be a much more

effective goal to work on controlling and preventing asthma attacks, particularly with children.

If asthma attacks were kept under better control, then children with asthma wouldn't have to miss so many school days or be rushed to the emergency room, and could focus on their education and play time. While often overlooked as a disease, asthma is currently one of the most disappeared chronic diseases in the world, affecting millions in America alone. Mostly a problem with children in the Western world, asthma can be a major obstacle in a person's life, and can prevent them from achieving what most healthy people can do. A disease that affects breathing and can make it difficult to exist in certain environments due to chances Of an asthma flare, asthma can often make patients feel as if they cannot keep up with everyone else, and can hurt them physically and emotionally.