

Educate yourself about asthma

ASTHMA BASICS

Asthma is no stranger to worldwide attention — in fact, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 300 million people suffer from the condition globally. And while living with asthma certainly isn't easy, the good news is that it can be controlled. There are plenty of steps you can take to control the condition so you'll have fewer or milder symptoms while enjoying a healthy, active life.

UNDERSTANDING THE TRIGGERS

Although the basic causes of asthma are not completely understood, the strongest risk factors for developing the condition are inhaled asthma triggers. Some common ones include:

- Indoor allergens, like dust mites in bedding, carpets and furniture, and pet dander
- Outdoor allergens, like pollen and mold
- Tobacco smoke
- Chemical irritants
- Outdoor environments, like extreme heat or cold.

Other triggers can include cold air, physical exercise, and even certain medications, such as aspirin.

The key to controlling asthma is working closely with your doctor to learn what to do, staying away from things that bother your airways, taking medications directed by your doctor and monitoring your asthma so you can respond quickly to signs of an attack.

CAUTION! ASTHMA WARNING SIGNS

Even if you've put yourself knowingly or unknowingly in a potential trigger's way, asthma has a way of telling you it's about to go on the attack. But paying attention to these symptoms may help you avoid a potential attack:

- Awakening at night
- Coughing, especially at night
- Difficulty breathing, or getting out of breath easily
- Breathing faster than normal
- Chest starts to feel tight or hurts
- Wheezing
- Change in face color
- Fatigue
- Itchy, watery or glassy eyes
- Itchy, scratchy or sore throat
- Sneezing
- Dark under-eye circles
- Stuffy head
- Headache
- Restlessness
- Runny or itchy nose
- Need more rescue medication than normal

BE WELL — An asthma attack is a narrowing of the airways brought on by a certain trigger. By knowing your triggers, you can educate yourself about how to avoid them and prevent attacks.



THE BUDDY SYSTEM

It's easier to control your asthma when you have a partner involved in your care. How about your doctor? He or she can:

- Talk with you about your treatment goals, and how best to reach them
- Give you a written asthma action plan, and teach you how to use it
- Discuss the medications you should be taking, including how much to take, when to take it, and any possible side effects
- Demonstrate how to take your medicines
- Show you how to monitor your asthma
- Help figure out your triggers, and how you can avoid them
- Describe the warning signs of an asthma attack, and what to do if you have one

Now that you know the triggers and symptoms of asthma in general, it's time to get specific. Work with your doctor to get to know your asthma, your triggers and your personal action plan.

Take action on your asthma. Resolution to make lifestyle changes, no matter how small, will make a big difference.



Sources: World Health Organization Asthma Fact Sheet N°307. August 2006. Accessed 2/20/08 at <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs307/en/index.html>.

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