

What Is Asthma?

Asthma is a disease that affects your breathing and your lungs. It makes the lining of your throat and lungs swell, and it is harder to breathe. This is called an asthma attack. Many people wheeze, cough, have chest tightness, and have trouble breathing when they have an asthma attack.

What Causes Asthma?

Doctors aren't sure what causes asthma, but they do know that some things can increase your risk of getting it. These include:

- Smoking.
- Allergies.
- Viral infections.
- Exposure to mice and cockroach waste.

Some things can trigger an attack if you have asthma. These include:

- Dust.
- Weather.
- Tobacco smoke.
- Polluted air.
- Perfumes.
- Cleaning products.
- Animals.
- Stress.
- Medications.
- Infections.
- Physical activity.

Asthma is a serious health concern. It is important to work with your doctor to treat asthma. If it is not controlled, asthma can get worse. In some cases, it can lead to Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). This sheet goes over the levels of asthma severity. You can also use this sheet to read about the different kinds of treatments for asthma, and how you can avoid being exposed to things that make your asthma flare up.

Is All Asthma the Same?

No. Doctors separate asthma into four levels of severity.

Mild Intermittent: With Mild Intermittent asthma, you have symptoms only sometimes. You might have trouble breathing two or less times a week. Your symptoms can be controlled with medication. With this kind of asthma, you don't have symptoms between asthma attacks.

Mild Persistent: Someone with Mild Persistent asthma has symptoms more than two times a week, and a nighttime asthma attack a few times each month. This kind of asthma may make it harder to do activities like walking or playing sports.

Moderate Persistent: With this kind of asthma, you have symptoms every day. You have at least one nighttime attack each week, sometimes more. Your doctor may prescribe a short-acting bronchodilator for you to use every day. The symptoms make it harder to be active.

Severe Persistent: You have ongoing symptoms that are hard to control. Asthma affects what you can and can't do every day.

How Can I Control My Asthma?

Talk to your doctor. Your doctor will help you treat other illnesses that affect your asthma. They will also give you tips on how to avoid certain asthma triggers, and help you understand how you can stay active with asthma. Together, you can make an asthma action plan to avoid getting attacks and what to do if you do have one.

What Are the Different Types of Medicines for Asthma?

There are two kinds of medicines:

- Long-term medicines help reduce airway swelling and prevent asthma attacks from happening.
- Quick-relief medicines help ease the symptoms of an asthma attack. These are also called rescue medicines.

You should always use medicines the way your doctor prescribes. Do not use quick-relief medicines in place of any long-term medicines your doctor prescribes. If you have to use your quick-relief medicine often, let your doctor know. They may need to adjust any long-term medicines you are taking.

Your level of asthma control may change over time. It can change with seasons, or it could change depending on if you are at home, school, or work.

Asthma Action Plans can help in the middle of an asthma attack and when you are not having symptoms. It will help remind you when to take your long-term medicines and give you a guide to use to determine what action to take next.

Need More Help?

Call 1-866-282-6280 (TTY: 711) to talk to our Care Coordinators.

If you need additional support managing asthma or other complex conditions, Arkansas Total Care staff want to help. Whether you'd like more resources or help finding a doctor, scheduling an appointment, or finding transportation to the doctor's office, our staff can work with you to get what you need.

