



# 5-minute safety talk

## Asthma

### What is asthma?

Asthma is a disease in which the airways of the lungs become blocked or narrowed, causing shortness of breath, wheezing, coughing, breathing trouble, and other symptoms. If an asthma attack is severe, a person may need emergency treatment to restore normal breathing.

### Do you have asthma?

Diagnosis is the first step in keeping asthma under control. Some early warning signs include:

- fatigue
- coughing, even when you do not have a cold
- wheezing
- difficulty breathing
- tightness in your chest
- runny nose
- itchy throat
- a change in thickness, amount, or color of your mucus

If you regularly have any of these symptoms, you should see a doctor as soon as possible. The earlier it is diagnosed, the earlier your asthma can be controlled.

### Triggers

Some people are more likely to develop asthma than others, and what triggers the disease can vary from person to person. Common triggers include: air pollution caused by such

things as cigarette smoke, vehicle exhaust, or fumes of cleaning products; allergic reaction to pollen mold, dust mites, animal fur or dander; exercise, especially in cold, dry air; certain foods such as nuts, eggs, milk; emotional stress; medications; temperature extremes; and respiratory infection, including the common cold.

Studies show children whose parents smoke are twice as likely to develop asthma as children of nonsmoking parents. Also, children whose mothers smoked during pregnancy tend to be born with smaller airways, which increases their chances of developing the disease.

### Avoiding an asthma attack

- Do not allow smoking indoors. Never allow smoking around anyone with asthma.
- Try to keep humidity levels in your home between 30 and 50 percent.
  - Use exhaust fans or open windows in the kitchen or bathroom areas when you are cooking, using the dishwasher, or taking a shower.
  - Vent your clothes dryer to the outside.
  - Use a dehumidifier in your basement.
- Avoid using a humidifier. If you cannot avoid it, clean the humidifier according to the manufacturer's instructions and refill it daily with fresh water.
- Decrease your exposure to combustion byproducts.

- Check furnaces, stoves, or heaters yearly to make sure they are operating properly.
- Change furnace filters according to the manufacturer's instructions, or every month or two during periods of use. Consider installing higher efficiency filters.
- Use the exhaust fan when you cook on a gas stove.
- Avoid sprays such as deodorant, perfume, and air freshener. Avoid odors from paint and strong smelling cleaners.
- Keep your house clean to reduce dust mites, pollen, and animal dander.
  - Enclose mattresses and box springs in plastic covers. Wash bedding frequently in hot (130°F) water. Avoid furnishings that collect dust.
  - Try to keep pets out of the bedrooms of family members with asthma.
  - Consider using a high-efficiency vacuum filter or a vacuum system that is vented to the outside to clean your house.
  - If possible, remove the carpeting, drapes, and all upholstered furniture from the bedrooms of family members who suffer from asthma.
  - Use a damp cloth to dust furniture and surfaces
  - Avoid fluffy blankets and pillows that collect dust and that contain feathers

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