

WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is a chronic disease that causes the airways of the lungs to swell and narrow, leading to wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness, and coughing. Asthma affects 22 million Americans and causes nearly 2 million emergency room visits each year. Asthma may occur at any age, although it is more common in younger individuals (under age 40). There is no cure for asthma, although symptoms sometimes improve over time. With proper self-management and medical treatment, most people with asthma can lead normal, productive lives.

There are three major features of asthma:

- ***Airway Obstruction:*** Allergy-causing substances and environmental triggers cause the bands of muscle surrounding the airways to tighten, and air cannot move freely.
- ***Inflammation:*** People with asthma have red, swollen bronchial tubes. This inflammation greatly contributes to the long-term damage that asthma can cause to the lungs.
- ***Airway Irritability:*** The airways of people with asthma are extremely sensitive. The airways tend to overreact and narrow due to even the slightest environmental triggers. Inflammation makes irritability worse.

ASTHMA SYMPTOMS

Most people with asthma have attacks separated by symptom-free periods. Some people have long-term shortness of breath with episodes of increased shortness of breath. Asthma attacks can last for minutes to days, and can become dangerous if the airflow is severely restricted. Symptoms include:

- Coughing, especially at night
- Shortness of breath that worsens with activity
- Wheezing
- Abnormal breathing pattern
- Chest pain, pressure, or tightness in chest

Not everyone with asthma has the same symptoms of an asthma attack. You may not have all of these symptoms, or your symptoms may vary from one attack to the next, being mild during one attack and severe during another.

ASTHMA CAUSES AND TRIGGERS

- Infections such as sinusitis, colds, and flu
- Allergens, such as pollens, mold spores, pet dander, and dust mites

- Irritants, such as strong odors from perfumes or cleaning solutions, and air pollution
- Tobacco smoke
- Gastric reflux, or heartburn
- Exercise, called exercised-induced asthma
- Weather; changes in temperature and/or humidity
- Medications, such as aspirin and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

ASTHMA TREATMENT

There are two basic kinds of medication for treating asthma; “controller drugs” to prevent attacks and “quick-relief drugs” for use during attacks.

The most common controller drugs are:

- Inhaled corticosteroids, which prevent symptoms by helping to keep your airways from swelling up.
- Long-acting beta-agonist inhalers also help prevent asthma symptoms.

Quick-relief drugs work fast to control asthma symptoms and include:

- Short-acting bronchodilators (inhalers)
- Oral steroids (corticosteroids) may be prescribed when you have an asthma attack that is not going away.

People who have a family history of asthma have an increased risk of developing the disease. However, anyone can develop asthma at any time, and adult-onset asthma happens frequently. If you have symptoms of asthma, talk to your doctor about treatment options. You and your doctor should work together to develop and carry out a plan for eliminating asthma triggers and monitoring symptoms.

WHO IS RX OUTREACH?

Rx Outreach is a non-profit organization that provides affordable medications to people in need. Through the Rx Outreach Program, low-income, uninsured patients have access to over 650 prescription medication strengths through our mail order pharmacy. Rx Outreach serves individuals and families whose income is 300% or less of the federal poverty level.

ASTHMA MEDICATIONS AVAILABLE ON RX OUTREACH

- ProAir® HFA
- Theophylline ER