

# Asthma - adult

## Patient education

### What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic condition that causes recurrent episodes of tightness and narrowing of the airways. The airways are the passageways that connect the nose and mouth to the lungs. Asthma attacks can range from minor to fatal. Although asthma cannot be cured, medications and lifestyle changes can help control it and treat acute attacks.

### What can cause asthma?

- Genetic factors
- Environmental factors
  - Pollen
  - Dust mites
  - Pets
- Common triggers including:
  - Mold
  - Cigarette smoke
  - Cockroaches
  - Allergens
  - Air pollutants
  - Changes in weather

### What increases the risks?

- Family history of asthma
- You have allergies
- You are exposed to certain chemical irritants or industrial dusts in the workplace
- You are a smoker

### How do I know that I have asthma?

- Wheezing
- Coughing in the middle of the night or early in the morning
- Coughing that is frequent or severe as a result of a common cold
- Tightness in the chest
- Breathing difficulty
- Fatigue while doing minimal activity

## How is this treated?

At this time, there is no treatment to cure Asthma or stop it from getting worse. The goals of treatment are:

- Asthma symptoms can be treated with two types of medications:
  - Maintenance puffer
  - Fast-acting reliever or rescue puffer
- Using other medicines:
  - Allergy medicine
  - Immunomodulators
- Creating an asthma action plan
  - A list of your asthma triggers and how to avoid them
  - Information on when to take medications and when to change their dosage

## If you have been diagnosed with asthma, please contact your doctor or health care provider immediately if you are experiencing any of the following:

- You continue to wheeze and cough while taking medicines
- Coughing up mucus that is thicker than usual.
- Your sputum turns yellow, green, grey, or bloody instead of clear or white
- Your medications are causing side effects like a rash, itching, swelling, or difficulty breathing
- You have a fever

## If you have been diagnosed with asthma, please get help immediately if you are experiencing any of the following:

- During an asthma attack, you are getting worse and do not respond to treatment
- When you are at rest or doing very little physical activity, you are out of breath
- Having difficulty eating, drinking, or conversing
- Experiencing chest pain or tightness
- Experience palpitations or a fast heartbeat
- Your lips or fingernails are bluish in colour
- Feeling dizzy or light-headed, or you faint

## Where can I get more information?

Asthma Canada

Website: [asthma.ca](http://asthma.ca)

Reference: Asthma. (2021, May 27). Elsevier Inc: ClinicalKey for Nursing.  
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