

Asthma Overview

Facts

- In 2001, 20.3 million Americans had asthma, with 12 million having an asthma attack the previous year

What is asthma?

Asthma is a disease affecting the lungs, which causes repeated episodes of wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness, and coughing.

Why is it a problem?

During an asthma attack, inflammation and swelling occurs in the lung airways, restricting the flow of air in and out of the lungs, which can cause severe breathing problems. These difficulties can be a severe problem at work, school or in social settings.

What causes it?

In most cases, what causes asthma to develop is unknown. However, if a person has a parent with asthma, he or she is three to six times more likely to develop asthma than a person who does not have a parent with asthma.

Asthma attacks **may** only occur when something in the environment bothers the lungs.

How is it prevented or treated?

Asthma can be difficult to diagnose, because in most cases what causes it to develop is unknown. Regular physical exams to check lung function (spirometry) and allergies are advised, to help make the correct diagnosis.

Asthma can be controlled by knowing the warning signs of an attack, avoiding things that trigger an attack, and following the advice of your doctor.

Important Asthma Triggers

- Environmental Tobacco Smoke (Secondhand Smoke)
- Dust, mold, outside air pollution
- Cockroach Allergen
- Pets
- Strenuous physical exercise
- Adverse weather conditions
- Some foods

For Further Information

All About Asthma

<http://www.asthma.org.uk/about/index.php>

Asthma Control Program

<http://www.hs.state.az.us/phs/oncdps/asthma/index.htm>

Basic Facts About Asthma

<http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/airpollution/asthma/faqs.htm>