

## Asthma

We likely all know someone with asthma, or maybe you have it yourself. It is so common that 7% of the world's population is affected by it. The basic definition of asthma is an inflammation and constriction of the airways. When this happens it is difficult to get enough air into your lungs or carbon dioxide out of your lungs. In severe cases the affected person can lose consciousness and die. Rarely does this happen, as most people affected know when an attack is coming on and take appropriate actions to prevent severe problems.

Asthma may present in different ways. It may show as a chronic cough with phlegm production. It may be entirely absent until an allergic trigger is present. For many it is sitting at a low steady state and will become an acute asthma attack with increased physical exertion. In fact exercise induced asthma is very common. Asthma can be caused by genetic and environmental factors. In other words you may have it because your mom did or you may get it from something you are exposed to. Poor air quality is closely related to asthma. Areas with lots of traffic or homes where the parents are smokers are prime examples. Antibiotic use early in life as well as having other allergies may increase the risk of having asthma. It was surprising to find that children who were raised in less hygienic atmospheres were less likely to have asthma. It seems that exposure to minor upper respiratory infections may reduce the risk of developing asthma, but if the child has lower respiratory (lung) infections it may increase the risk of asthma. Occupational asthma is not uncommon. People who work in manufacturing industries are more at risk if there is exposure to animal proteins, latex, chemicals and flour.

Most often asthma is treated with the use of inhalers. Commonly inhalers operate to either prevent the occurrence of an attack or to work as a rescue when an attack is already happening. The inhalers used to prevent are commonly corticosteroid. They come with some side effects if used in too high a dose. Most often the doses used to treat asthma are small, but in high doses fat gain, osteoporosis or oral thrush may result. If you are on very high doses you should consult your doctor about some measures to prevent the side effects from being serious, such as calcium supplementation and exercise. To prevent oral thrush always rinse your mouth out after inhaler use. The rescue inhalers are commonly albuterol or some other fast acting drug that dilates the airways but does not work as long term anti-inflammatory. Most doctors recommend that preventative measures are used most and rescue inhalers are used only for true emergencies.

There are some natural ways of treating asthma that have shown some reasonable results. First, I always recommend that a diary be kept of food, daily activities and chemical exposures and compared to the days with significant attacks. Over time most people can figure out their triggers. It can be anything from the cat, to the laundry detergent, to the food coloring in your cereal. Triggers should be avoided and if possible moved out of the house altogether. Second, if you are not having a severe asthma attack and can wait a few minutes, a cup of coffee often works just as well as a rescue inhaler. Third, a chiropractic adjustment combined with deep massage can release fixations around the rib cage that often comes from labored breathing. This will increase the amount of air you can hold. Last, I have seen a combination of acupuncture and herbs be effective at reducing the incidence of asthma attacks.

Remember, asthma needs to be properly diagnosed by a health care professional. Once there is proper understanding of the disease any treatment protocol needs to have preventative measures in place as well as methods for treating emergencies.