



## Asthma

### What is asthma?

Asthma is a disease that causes inflammation of the airways in the lungs. It is one of the most common long-term diseases in children, but it affects adults, too. Asthma is a condition that you have all the time, but you will have an asthma attack only when something irritates your lungs.

### What are the symptoms of an asthma attack?

During an asthma attack, your airways constrict, which obstructs the airflow in and out of the lungs. Symptoms include wheezing, coughing, tightness in the chest and shortness of breath. You may also feel too breathless to speak, eat or sleep. A severe asthma attack can be life threatening.

### How is asthma diagnosed?

Asthma can be diagnosed based on your medical history. Your doctor will probably ask you if a cough a lot, especially at night, and whether you have difficulty breathing after physical activity. Children with food allergies may be more susceptible to asthma, too. Adults with sensitive noses (allergic rhinitis) or chronic skin rashes (eczema) are also prone. Your doctor may perform a lung function test, which involves simply blowing forcefully into a machine that measures air flow.



# ASTHMA & ALLERGY ASSOCIATION

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## What causes an asthma attack?

An asthma attack is triggered when you are exposed to things in the environment, like tobacco smoke, or allergens, like house dust mites, pollen, pet fur or perfumes. Cold, dry air, cold drinks, and infections, such as the common cold, can also trigger an attack. Medications, in particular the Non Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), which include Aspirin, Mefenamic acid (Ponstan) and Diclofenac (Voltaren), can also bring an attack on.

## What is the treatment for asthma?

There is no cure for asthma, although some children can grow out of it. Asthma, however, can be controlled and attacks prevented with proper treatment.

Asthma patients are usually treated with an inhaler that delivers fixed doses of medication into the airways. There are several types of inhalers with different medications, which should be prescribed by a doctor who is familiar with your condition.

Medications delivered by inhalers are classified as 'relievers' and 'preventers'. A reliever inhaler is used to relieve symptoms, like breathlessness and wheezing, during an asthma attack. These drugs open up the airways and ease symptoms. A 'preventer' inhaler is taken every day to prevent symptoms from developing. These medications reduce inflammation in the airways. It can take several days for the effect to build up, so it's important to stick to the schedule prescribed by your doctor. Your doctor may reduce the dose and frequency when your asthma becomes well controlled. Failure to maintain regular use of the 'preventer' inhaler is a common reason for recurrence or poor control of asthma symptoms.

## What should I do after an asthma attack?

If you do not feel better after taking your inhaler, see a doctor or go to a hospital. Symptoms occasionally may get worse, even after taking medication.

Asthma attacks are often the result of gradual worsening of symptoms over a few days that you may not have noticed. If you need to use your reliever inhaler more than three times a week, it could be that your asthma is not under control. Again, see a doctor.



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You should also work with your doctor to develop an asthma action plan to help control your condition. This plan will show your daily treatment, and explain when to call the doctor or go the emergency room. If your child has asthma, share this plan with their teachers and caregivers. Don't assume an inhaler or 'puffer' will always solve the problem.

## About Us

The Asthma and Allergy Association is a community-based organization that aims to increase awareness of allergic diseases in Singapore, and facilitate patient education and empowerment.

We hold a series of public talks and family-oriented events throughout the year, such as the World Asthma Day and our Food Allergy Awareness Day family carnival & seminar, as well as other public education programs. The AAA also administers several funds to help low-income families buy asthma and eczema medications.

To join the AAA, visit our website at [www.aaa.org.sg](http://www.aaa.org.sg) and download a membership form. Membership costs just \$20 a year. Members receive invitations to family activities and free seminars and talks by leading allergy specialists. We can also help you connect with support groups in Singapore.