

### ASTHMA: What is it?

Asthma is a chronic lung disease that can be controlled but not cured. The airways of people with asthma are quite sensitive to things that don't bother the airways of other people. In someone with asthma, the airways over-react to things in the air called "triggers." Asthma triggers can start (or make worse) the following kinds of problems:

- The walls of the airways swell and become irritated--this is called inflammation.
- The muscles that encircle the airways begin to squeeze or become tight--this is called bronchospasm (bron-ko-spas-m).
- Lots of mucus begins to build up.

This combination of swelling, squeezing, and extra mucus can cause problems: the airways become narrow (obstructed) and can make it difficult to breathe.

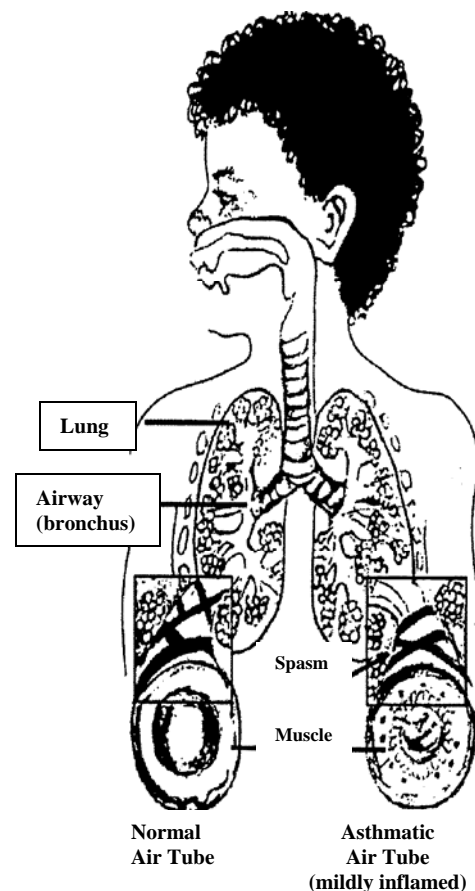
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#### *Asthma Triggers*

There are three major groups of triggers:

1. **Infections** such as colds and sinus infections.  
Everyone with asthma has a problem with this trigger.
2. **Allergies** to pollen (from trees, grass, weeds), molds, animal dander, dust mites, and cockroaches.
3. **Irritants** such as tobacco smoke, perfume, or chemical fumes from heaters.

Often, children will have symptoms when **exercising** or breathing **cold air**. But with proper medication, almost all children with asthma can and should exercise and play outdoors.



### *Asthma Symptoms*

1. **Symptoms**

- Coughing
- Wheezing (a high-pitched whistling sound when your child breathes)
- A feeling of tightness or pain in the chest
- Feeling short of breath

2. **Persistent Asthma**

If symptoms occur frequently, such as more than twice a week, your child has persistent asthma. When your child's asthma is under control, asthma symptoms should be uncommon. Taking medications regularly and avoiding triggers can control persistent asthma. See your child's asthma management plan: Green Zone.

3. **Asthma Flares**

An asthma "flare" or "attack" occurs when asthma symptoms worsen, affecting activities, especially play, exercise, and sleep. Treatment of flares is spelled out in your child's asthma management plan: Yellow Zone and Red Zone.

### *Asthma Medicines*

Asthma is treated with two general categories of medicine:

1. **Long-term controller medicines**, prevent airway inflammation, usually taken once or twice daily. These medicines prevent persistent symptoms and decrease the number and severity of asthma flares.
3. **Quick-relief (or "rescue") medicines**, help relieve symptoms as they appear, BUT these medicines DO NOT prevent daily symptoms or flares. Frequent need for these medicines means that asthma is not well controlled.

*The key to managing asthma is keeping it under control by:*

- 1) *avoiding triggers and*
- 2) *by using controller medicines as prescribed*

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