

What Is Asthma?

For children and families

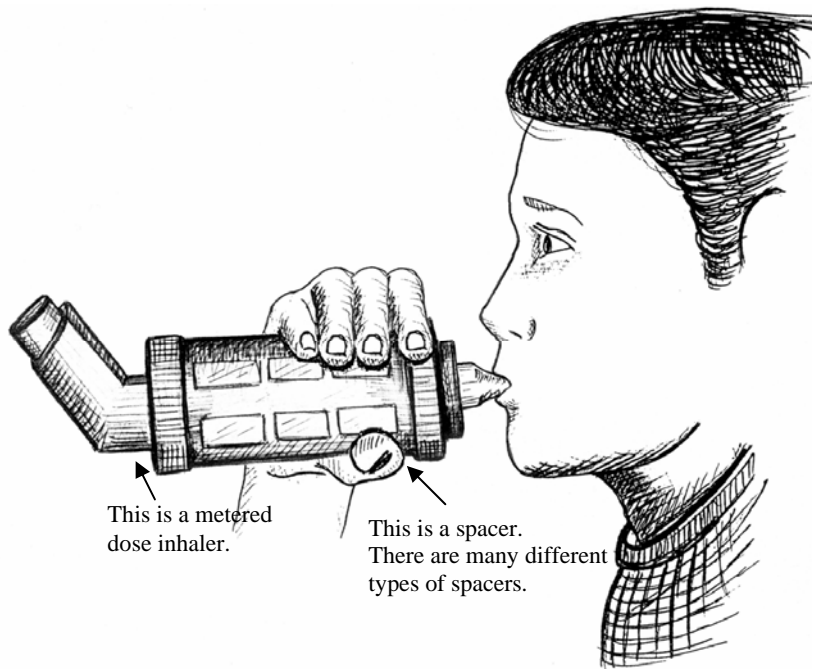
What causes asthma?

No one really knows what causes a person to have asthma (pronounced “**az** ma”), but we do know that a lot of people have it. About 1 out of every 10 kids has it. That means about 3 kids in your classroom have asthma just like you! They live in a lot of places—in big cities, small towns, and even on farms! We also know that even though it can be hard when you have asthma, in most cases, it is not serious.

Every kid with asthma needs to see a health care provider at least once a year. Together, you can make a written plan on what to do when you are having an asthma attack and what to do when you’re not. To take charge of your asthma, you can:

- Stay away from those things that can start an asthma attack. These are called asthma triggers. Everybody has different triggers, and you will need to find out what yours are.

- Keep your medicines and spacers with you wherever you go. Most kids use an inhaler with a spacer, diskus, or turbohaler. Some kids use a nebulizer. Learning to use these tools takes a lot of practice.
- Learn your body’s signals that let you know if your asthma is getting worse.
- Let an adult know if your asthma gets worse.

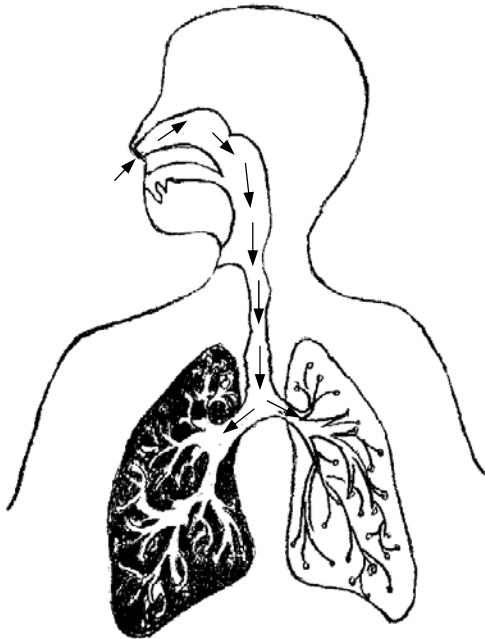


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What happens when I have an asthma attack?

The air you breathe goes in and out of your lungs through tubes. Three things happen when you have an asthma attack:

1. The tubes in your lungs get swollen.
2. The muscles around the tubes get tight.
3. Your lungs make mucus.



Normal airways

Constricted airways
(in asthma)

When these things happen, your chest feels tight and it's hard to breathe. You may cough or "wheeze." Wheezing is when you make a whistling sound when you breathe. It might be hard to talk, and you may wake up at night coughing. An asthma attack can happen in just a few minutes or over a few hours.

What should I do when I have an asthma attack?

If you have asthma, you and your health care provider will make a special plan together, just for you. You need to use your plan if you have an asthma attack.

What do I tell other kids about my asthma?

Most kids with asthma can do what other kids can do. They just have to be a little more careful, that's all. You might not have to tell other kids anything about your asthma. But if you do, you can just say that there are things that make it hard for you to breathe sometimes and that you take medicine for it.

Remember these things

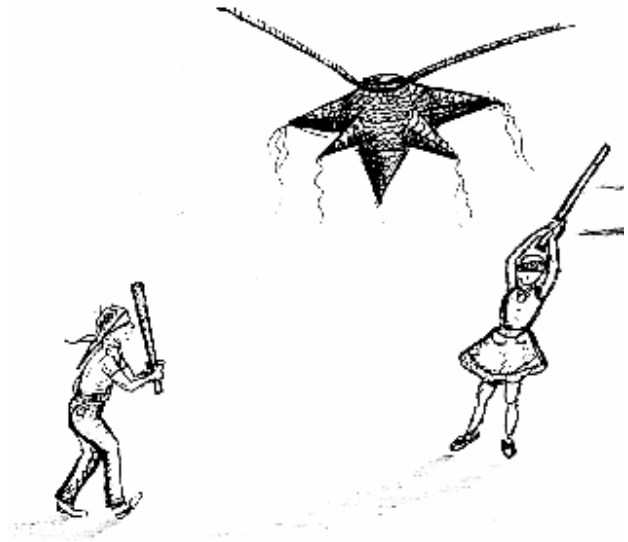
- You are not contagious. No one can "catch" asthma from you. You can hug or kiss your family and friends.



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Remember these things, continued

- You are not weak. Asthma has nothing to do with being strong or weak, any more than getting chickenpox or a cold has to do with being strong or weak. In fact, many world-class athletes have asthma. For example, football player Chad Brown, Olympic gold-medal swimmer Megan Jendrick and runner Jackie Joyner-Kersey have asthma.
- There's nothing you did that caused you to get asthma. It's not your fault.
- If you have asthma, the main thing to know is this: you can do most anything.



This handout has been reviewed by community and Children's Hospital health care providers. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's health care provider. Adapted from Living with Asthma, Children's Hospital and Regional Medical Center. Thanks to Laura Castello, illustrator, and Neal Starkman, writer, Flashpoint Development.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Pulmonary Medicine, (206) 987-2174
- Your Child's Health Care Provider
- Center for Children with Special Needs Web site at www.cshcn.org
- Children's Resource Line (206) 987-2500 or (866) 987-2500 toll-free Washington, Alaska, Montana, Idaho, or www.seattlechildrens.org

Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Please call Marketing Communications at (206) 987-5205.

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Center for Children with Special Needs
A Program of
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Washington State Department of
Health
Children with Special Health Care Needs Program