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ADULT HEALTH BULLETIN

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Reprinted by:
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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC: ASTHMA

Asthma is a disease that involves your lungs. Many children have this disease, but many adults do too. If you already have asthma, you will have it all the time. But remember, you will only have an asthma attack when something bothers your lungs. Physicians and researchers still do not know why we get asthma or how to cure it. We do know that if someone in your family has asthma, you are more likely to get it also.

Asthmas causes periods of:

- Wheezing
- Breathlessness
- Chest tightness
- Nighttime or early morning coughing

How do you diagnose asthma?

It can be hard to diagnose asthma, especially in young children. When children go for their regular physical checkups,

the doctor will generally check for lung function. For adults, tell the healthcare provider if you have been coughing a lot or having breathing problems after physical activity or during certain times of the year. He or she will most likely ask you if you have been wheezing or feeling tightness in your chest.

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Avoid asthma attacks by talking to your healthcare provider and taking your medications as prescribed.

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You may also take a lung function test, called spirometry (spy-rom-e-tree). A spirometer (spy-rom-e-ter) measures the amount of air that you breathe out after taking a deep breath in.

What is an asthma attack?

An asthma attack happens when the airways to your lungs become smaller. You are able to get less air in and out of your lungs.

What causes an asthma attack?

An attack happens when you are exposed to a trigger. Each person may have different triggers and different reactions to those triggers.

Common asthma triggers

- Tobacco smoke
- Dust
- Outdoor air pollution
- Pets
- Mold

Other triggers for asthma:

- Strenuous physical activity
- Certain medicines

- Weather conditions such as thunderstorms, high humidity, or freezing temperatures
- Some foods and food additives
- Strong emotional reactions

It is best to learn what triggers your attacks so that you can stay away from them. If a trigger cannot be kept away, be watchful for a possible attack.

How do you treat asthma?

Avoid asthma attacks by talking to your healthcare provider and taking your medications as prescribed. You should also stay away from triggers as much as possible.

Many of the medicines available for asthma help you have milder and fewer attacks. You still should avoid your triggers whenever possible.

Currently, 16.4 million (7.3 percent) adults and 7 million (9.4 percent) children have asthma.

SOURCES:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009). Asthma FASTATS.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "You can control your asthma: A guide to understanding Asthma and its triggers" <http://www.cdc.gov/asthma>

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