



Neighborhood Health Partners

Managing Asthma

What Is Asthma?

Asthma is a chronic lung disease that inflames and narrows your airways. For some people, asthma is a minor problem. But for others, it interrupts daily life and can lead to a life-threatening asthma attack.

When asthma flares, your airways tighten and narrow. Narrow airways stop air from passing through and make it hard to breathe.

Treatment helps reduce airway swelling and inflammation. Over time, treatment may lead to permanent good changes in the airways.

Asthma Warning Signs

- Frequent wheezing
- Frequent tightness of the chest
- Frequent shortness of breath
- Frequent coughing, especially at night or early in the morning
- Difficulty sleeping because of shortness of breath or coughing
- Tiredness

Diagnosis

Asthma is diagnosed in several ways. Spirometry is a test that measures the amount and speed of air you blow out. Doctors also use your health history, an exercise or inhalation challenge, chest X-rays and other exams to diagnose asthma.

Complications

Complications linked to uncontrolled asthma include the following:

- Permanent bad changes in lung function
- Frequent coughing
- Trouble breathing
- Decreased ability to exercise or finish physical activities
- Lack of sleep because of nighttime symptoms

Tips to Help You Take Control

- Develop an action plan
- Know and avoid asthma triggers
- Always carry an inhaler and take asthma medicine as prescribed
- Avoid tobacco and secondhand smoke
- Exercise according to your doctor's advice

If you feel breathless, your asthma may be getting worse. Call your doctor or 911 right away!

Reference Guideline: National Asthma Education and Prevention Program, Third Expert Panel on the Diagnosis and Management of Asthma. Expert Panel Report 3: Guidelines for the Diagnosis and Management of Asthma. Bethesda (Md.): National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (US); 2007 August.