

Childhood asthma



When kids have asthma

Asthma attacks can make it hard for kids to do normal things. They might have trouble sleeping, keeping up at school or even playing. A bad asthma attack can send a child to the hospital.¹

What happens during an asthma attack?

During an asthma attack, the airways and lungs become irritated, and they swell.¹ Muscles around the airways tighten. As the airways tighten and swell, less air gets through to the lungs. Asthma attacks can make people cough, wheeze and have trouble breathing.²

Asthma attacks happen when the body over-reacts to certain things. These things are called “triggers.” Some common triggers include:^{1,3}

- Having a cold or other infection.
- Breathing tobacco smoke or polluted air.
- Being around things like dust mites, pet dander, mold or pollen (these are called allergens).
- Weather changes.
- Breathing cold, dry air.
- Physical activity, including normal play.
- Getting very excited, mad, scared or upset.

Tips to help your kids stay active – and control their asthma⁴

- Take it easy. Start exercising slowly and finish with a cool-down.
- Stay away from things that trigger asthma.
- Take breaks. They can catch their breath, and remind them to drink lots of water.
- Mix it up. Try different activities, like skating or a long walk in the park.
- Check air quality first. Go online or watch the weather report on TV. Exercise outside only when the air is clean.

What causes asthma?

Children with asthma have sensitive immune systems. A sensitive immune system can be a family trait. Other things that make a child more likely to have asthma include:¹

- Having allergies or a family history of allergies.
- Living in an area with a lot of air pollution.
- Having a runny or stuffy nose all the time.
- Low birth weight (under 5.5 lbs.)
- Being overweight.
- Having heartburn or reflux.
- Having certain lung infections.

Kids with asthma can have healthy, normal lives if they stick to an asthma management plan.³

Your child’s pediatrician will help you make an asthma management plan. Usually a plan includes two kinds of medicine. One is a daily medicine to help control symptoms. The other is a rescue medicine in an inhaler, for stopping an asthma attack once it starts.¹



Sources:
1 Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, *Childhood Asthma* (September 21, 2010): mayoclinic.com
2 Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, *Asthma Attack* (January 6, 2011): mayoclinic.com
3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Asthma Control Program, *Asthma Fast Facts for Kids* (accessed March 16, 2011): cdc.gov
4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Asthma: Kids* (July 12, 2012): cdc.gov/asthma/children.html

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