

# Asthma

## What is Asthma?

Asthma is a lung problem that causes swelling and irritation of the airways and makes you wheeze, cough, and feel short of breath. The airways are the tubes that carry air in and out of your lungs. If you have asthma, the airways in your lungs are always a little swollen, even when you do not have any symptoms.

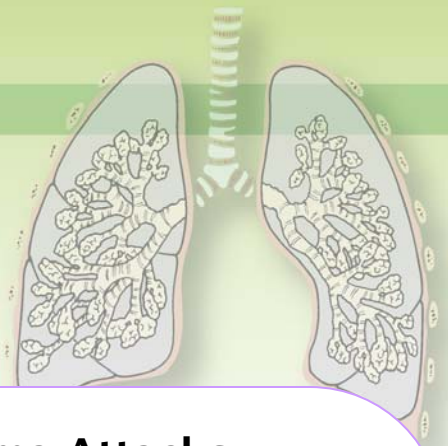
Things like dust, pollen, and colds can cause your airways to become more swollen and make more mucus. Plus, the tiny muscles in the walls of the airways tighten, which causes the airway openings to get smaller. This makes it harder for air to move in and out. Asthma may be mild, moderate, or severe. You may have more trouble during a certain season.



**Normal airway**



**Tightened airway in a person with asthma**



### Asthma Attacks

When you start coughing or wheezing, it is called an asthma attack. You may have an attack:

- ♦ When you exercise.
- ♦ When you breathe in something you are allergic to, such as dust, pollen, mold, or animal fur.
- ♦ When you breathe in something that bothers your lungs, like cold air, strong smells, or smoke.

An asthma attack may last a few minutes or several days. Get help right away if you are having an asthma attack that is not getting better even after you have used your medicine.

### Take Care of Yourself

Your doctor can give you medicine to help. You may only need to take medicine during an asthma attack or before exercising. If your asthma is bad, you may need to take medicine every day. If you smoke, you need to quit.

You will also need to:

- Learn how to tell when you are starting to have an asthma attack.
- Go to all your doctor appointments.
- Take your medicine just as your doctor tells you.
- Get a flu shot every year.
- Keep your house clean.
- Wash your bedding every week.
- Stay away from mold, smoke, strong smells and other things that make it hard for you to breathe.