

What Is Asthma?

Asthma is a lung condition that causes difficulty breathing, and it's common among kids and teens. Symptoms include coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath. Anyone can have asthma, even infants, and the tendency to develop the condition is often inherited.

Asthma affects the bronchial tubes, or airways. When someone breathes normally, air is taken in through the nose or mouth and then goes into the trachea (windpipe), passing through the bronchial tubes, into the lungs, and finally back out again.

But people with asthma have inflamed airways that produce lots of thick mucus. They're also overly sensitive, or hyperreactive, to certain things, like exercise, dust, or cigarette smoke. This hyperreactivity causes the smooth muscle that surrounds the airways to tighten up. The combination of airway inflammation and muscle tightening narrows the airways and makes it difficult for air to move through.

When you control your asthma:

- you won't have symptoms such as wheezing or coughing,
- you'll sleep better,
- you won't miss work or school,
- you can take part in all physical activities, and
- you won't have to go to the hospital.