Asthma: What You Need to Know

Asthma is a disease that causes the airways in the lungs to swell or tighten. In this handout, you will learn about asthma. You will also learn how to manage your child’s asthma and what to do if your child has an asthma attack.

WHAT IS ASTHMA?
Asthma is a chronic (long-term) disease that causes the airways in your child’s lungs to become inflamed (swell or tighten). The airways are tubes that carry air in and out of the lungs. When the airways are inflamed, it can be hard for your child to breathe.

WHAT ARE COMMON SYMPTOMS OF ASTHMA?
- Periods of wheezing (whistling sound when you breathe out) that happen regularly
- Chest tightness
- Shortness of breath
- Coughing, especially at night

WHAT CAN CAUSE ASTHMA SYMPTOMS?
The causes of asthma symptoms are different for every person who has asthma. Some common triggers include:
- Viral infections (like a cold or the flu)
- Allergies
- Pollen or mold
- Pet hair or dander
- Smoke

WHAT ARE COMMON TREATMENTS FOR ASTHMA?
The most important treatment for asthma is to keep your child away from his asthma triggers as much as possible. In addition to this, some children might also need medications to manage their symptoms.

Some common treatments include:
- Daily inhalers to keep the lungs healthy
- Rescue inhalers to treat cough or shortness of breath symptoms
- Nebulizer treatments (medications breathed into the lungs through a nebulizer machine)
- Oral steroids (medication taken by mouth to control inflammation in the lungs) ideally used only for bad asthma symptoms

Your child should take his medications as directed. Taking medications on time and in the correct doses will help manage his asthma symptoms in the short-term and long-term.

MY CHILD IS NOT HAVING ASTHMA SYMPTOMS. DOES HE STILL NEED TO SEE A DOCTOR?
Yes. Your child should see a doctor for asthma check-ups even when he feels well. This helps to ensure that your child’s asthma is not limiting them from his favorite activities.

During appointments, your child’s care team can adjust medications as needed. The care team can also talk about how to prevent asthma symptoms through lifestyle changes.
WILL MY CHILD OUTGROW HIS ASTHMA?

Some children outgrow their asthma. Others do not. Talk with your child’s care team if you have questions about whether your child will outgrow asthma.

WHAT IS AN ASTHMA ACTION PLAN?

An Asthma Action Plan is a set of steps that you or your child can take to help ease asthma symptoms during an asthma attack (asthma symptoms suddenly and quickly get worse). Your child’s care team can help create and explain an Asthma Action Plan.

MY CHILD DOES NOT LIKE TO TAKE HIS MEDICATIONS OR DOES NOT TAKE THEM PROPERLY. WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP HIM?

There is usually a reason why children do not take their medications properly. This is especially true for teenagers.

Here are some ways you can help your child:

- Ask your child about any concerns or challenges he has when taking asthma medications. Knowing the reason why can help you and your child come up with a solution

- Explain why and how taking his medication can help him both in the short-term and long-term.

- Encourage your teen to use a reminder to take his medications. This can be as simple as using an app on his phone, setting an alarm or putting a sticky note somewhere he will see it every day.

What is an asthma attack?

An asthma attack is when a person’s asthma symptoms suddenly and quickly get worse. It becomes very hard for the person to breathe. Sometimes asthma attacks happen without warning. Other times, a person might feel an asthma attack coming on.

If your child has an asthma attack, follow the steps in his Asthma Action Plan. If your child does not have an Asthma Action Plan, ask the care team to create one with you.

Watch a video to learn more about asthma from Pediatric Pulmonary Medicine at MGHfC. Video courtesy of Vidscrip®.

Visit https://goo.gl/hu5ASc

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