

ASTHMA SYMPTOMS

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Asthma Symptoms

People with asthma have symptoms when the airways are narrowed (bronchospasm), swollen (inflamed), or filled with mucus. Common symptoms of asthma include:

- Coughing, especially at night
- Wheezing
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness, pain, or pressure

Not every person with asthma has the same symptoms in the same way. You might not have all of these symptoms, or you might have different symptoms at different times. The symptoms might also vary from one asthma episode to the next, being mild during one asthma episode and severe during another.

Some people with asthma might have extended symptom-free periods, interrupted by periodic asthma episodes, while others have some symptoms every day. In addition, some people with asthma might only have symptoms during exercise, or when they are exposed to allergens or viral respiratory tract infections.

Mild asthma episodes are generally more common. Usually with treatment, the airways open up within a few minutes to a few hours. Severe episodes are less common, but last longer and require immediate medical help. It is important to recognize and treat even mild symptoms to help prevent severe episodes and keep asthma in better control.

Early warning signs

Early warning signs are changes that happen just before or at the very beginning of an asthma episode. These changes start before the well-known symptoms of asthma and are the earliest signs that a person's asthma is worsening.

In general, these signs are not severe enough to stop a person from going about his or her daily activities. By recognizing these signs, you can stop an asthma episode or prevent one from getting worse. Early warning signs include:

- Frequent cough, especially at night
- Losing your breath easily or shortness of breath
- Feeling very tired or weak when exercising
- Wheezing or coughing after exercise
- Feeling tired, easily upset, grouchy, or moody
- Decreases or changes in a peak expiratory flow
- Signs of a cold, upper respiratory infection, or allergies (sneezing, runny nose, cough, congestion, sore throat, and headache)
- Trouble sleeping

If you have early warning signs or symptoms, you should take more asthma medicine for flare-up or poor control as described in your Asthma Action Plan.

Symptoms of worsening asthma

If early warning signs and symptoms are not recognized and treated, the asthma episode can progress and symptoms might worsen. As symptoms worsen, you might have more difficulty performing daily activities and sleeping. Symptoms of worsening asthma include:

- A cough that won't go away (day and night)
- Wheezing
- Tightness in the chest
- Shortness of breath
- Poor response to quick relief, inhaled medicines (bronchodilators)

Late, severe symptoms

When asthma symptoms become severe, you will be unable to perform regular activities. If you have late, severe symptoms, follow the "Red Zone" or emergency instructions in the Asthma Action Plan immediately. These symptoms occur in life-threatening asthma episodes. You need medical help right away. Late, severe symptoms include:

- Severe wheezing (both when breathing in and out)
- Coughing that won't stop
- Very rapid breathing
- Inability to catch your breath
- Chest pain or pressure

- Tightened neck and chest muscles (retractions)
- Difficulty talking
- Inability to fully exhale
- Feelings of anxiety or panic
- Pale, sweaty face
- Blue lips or fingernails

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