

IT'S EASY, JUST TAKE A DEEP BREATH

If you have asthma, or know someone who does, you already know that taking a deep breath is not that simple. Breathing deeply when your lungs are tight with inflammation is like running a marathon with a broken leg, or doing multiplication tables in your head while dealing with a migraine—faintly possible, but definitely not easy!

Millions of people suffer from asthma, and the statistics are staggering. Every day in the United States, 40,000 people miss school or work, 30,000 people have an asthma attack, 5,000 people visit the emergency room, 1,000 people are admitted to the hospital, and 11 people die—all due to asthma.

But, What is Asthma?

Do you remember those paper drinking straws that always got soggy and collapsed on themselves, making it impossible to suck up any liquid? Well, *asthma is like trying to breathe through a collapsed straw*. The technical description is that asthma is inflammation which limits the amount of air travelling through the bronchial tubes in the lungs, causing shortness of breath.

To make it more challenging, cells in the lungs often generate extra mucus, so that you're not trying to drink something fluid like water through that straw, but a thick, goopy milk shake. Asthma is a treatable condition, but chronic—you can't assume that it will ever go away. The trick is to make sure the straws stay open.

What Triggers an Asthma Attack?

The triggers of an asthma attack range from an allergic reaction to a blast of particularly cold air to extreme stress. When a sufferer's asthma is flaring up, their lungs will be extra sensitive, and an attack can be triggered by the most innocuous things—a lit candle, strong soap, or even a gust of fresh air. Here is a list of some of the more common triggers.

- Allergens, such as pollen, animal dander, or mold
- Air pollutants and irritants
- Smoke
- Strong odors, scented products, or chemicals
- Respiratory infections, including the common cold
- Physical exertion, exercise
- Strong emotions and stress
- Cold air
- Cockroaches and dust mites
- Some medicines, such as beta blockers, aspirin, and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs

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What Are the Symptoms of an Asthma Attack?

Symptoms vary, of course, and range from mild to severe and life-threatening. *An acute attack should always be taken seriously.* Symptoms can include wheezing, shortness of breath, tightness or pain in the chest, coughing, or even something as simple as noisy, faster breathing.

What Can I Do to Prevent an Attack?

There's no easy answer to this. Preventing an asthma attack is like trying to prevent the rain. If it's going to come, it's going to come—all you can do is be prepared with a secure roof, an umbrella, a rain coat, galoshes, and maybe some hot tea for comfort.

That doesn't mean that asthma attacks are inevitable. There are things you can do to prevent them. First and foremost, medication is key. It can help control the inflammation and reduce the allergic reactions that can trigger an attack. *No matter how much you may prefer to rely on home remedies, in a life-threatening situation, modern medicine is the way to go.* However, there are other things you can do to help promote your good health.

- Keep indoor air clean, use an air conditioner or air filters to remove allergens
- Exercise
- Maintain optimal humidity
- Clean regularly, control dust mites, reduce pet dander
- Limit use of contact lenses
- Control heartburn and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)
- Do not smoke or allow smoking in your home
- Avoid cold air, wear a scarf over your mouth and nose in the winter
- Eat healthy food

Ultimately, asthma can attack at any time. Childhood asthma is a growing threat and while some children may outgrow it, some may not. Left untreated and uncontrolled, asthma can cost you your life—so why take chances?

Don't take those deep breaths for granted.

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