

# Asthma...

## What's That?

Asthma is a disease of the tubes that carry air to the lungs. When irritated, the tubes become narrow and the lining becomes swollen, irritated, and inflamed, causing an asthma attack. Asthma is a chronic disease, meaning you can never get rid of it, but you can control it with help from your doctor and by avoiding irritants that may trigger your asthma attack as much as possible.

 **Durham Regional Hospital**  
DUKE UNIVERSITY HEALTH SYSTEM

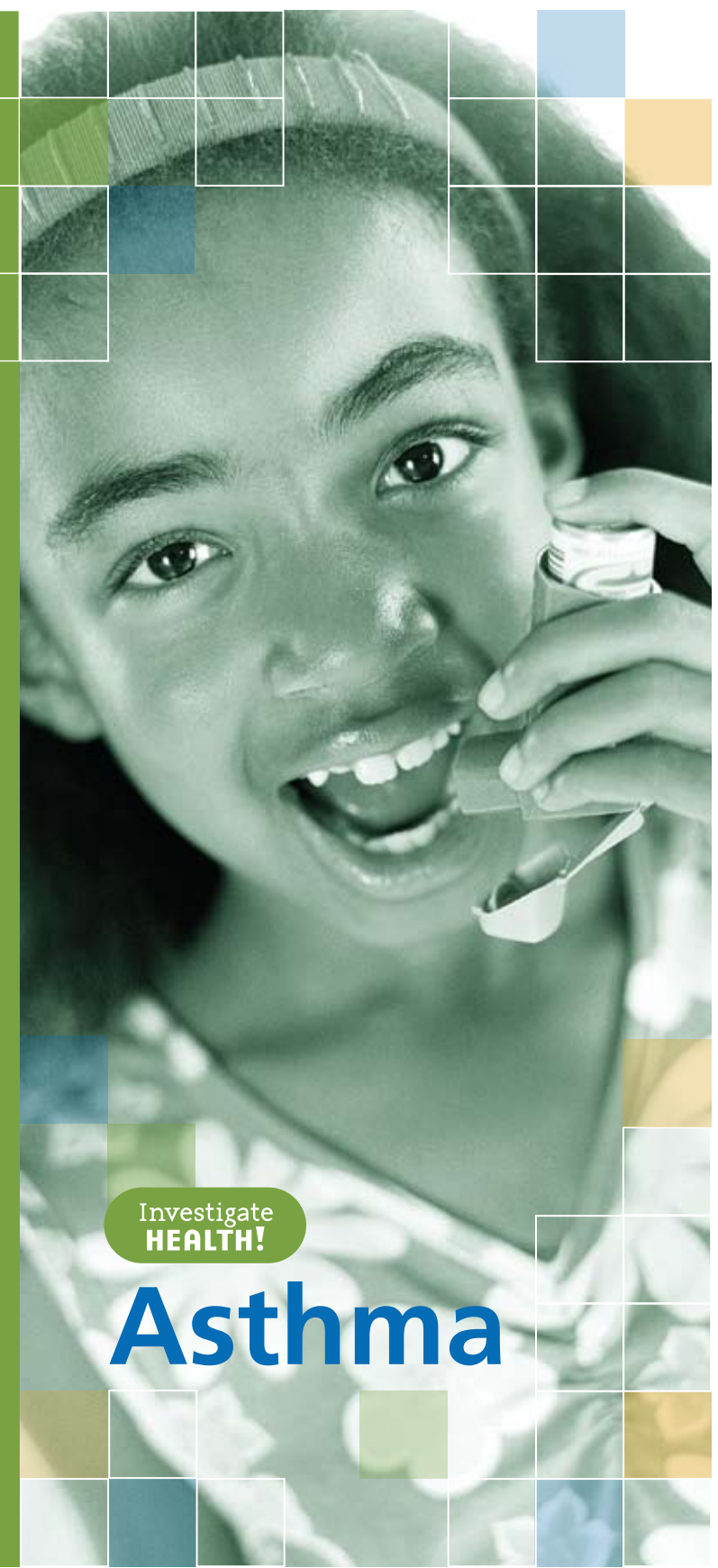
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# Asthma

## Who gets asthma?

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, studies have shown that children's exposure to infections early in life can determine whether they develop allergies or asthma. Children who come from big families, live with pets, or spend the first years of their lives in day care are less likely to develop asthma. Children who have a family history of asthma or whose mothers smoked while pregnant are at a higher risk for asthma.

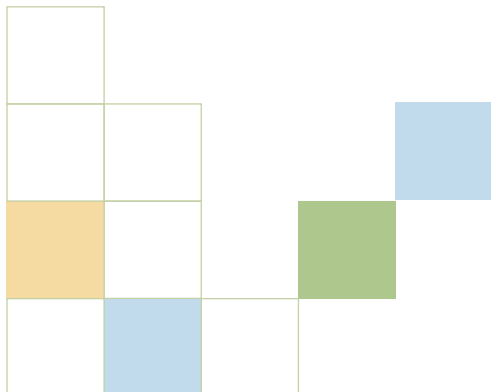
## How can you tell if you have asthma?

Any of the following symptoms may mean you have asthma:

- Excessive coughing during exercise or while resting after exercising
- Shortness of breath
- Making a wheezing sound when breathing
- Feeling tightness in your chest

## How do doctors know if you have asthma?

After symptoms are noticed, a doctor will look at family history, the type of symptoms you are having, and what triggers these symptoms. The doctor may test your airway function and put you on medication. Asthma, however, is hard to diagnose. Some people may pass the airway test but actually have asthma and others may wheeze while breathing but not have asthma.



## Living with asthma

According to the National Center for Disease Statistics, in 2006 15.7 million adults and 6.5 million children were living with asthma. It was also the cause of 1.8 million emergency room visits during this same year. From 2001 to 2005, asthma was one of the leading chronic childhood diseases in the United States and a major cause of childhood disability.

### What can trigger an asthma attack?

- Dust and dust mites
- Cockroaches
- House pets
- Molds
- Secondhand cigarette smoke
- Pollen
- Air pollution
- Crying, laughing, or feeling afraid
- Colds or other illnesses
- Medications
- Strong wind and cold temperatures
- Vigorous exercise and playing

### Signs you are having an asthma attack:

- Gasping for air
- Coughing
- Trouble breathing

## Controlling your asthma

Make a note of what you were doing or where you were when an asthma attack occurred. If you know what triggers your asthma attacks, you have a better chance of preventing them in the future. For example, if you know you experience trouble breathing around cats, you may need to stay away from homes that have animals indoors.

## Asthma research

**Once-a-day inhaler for mild asthma sufferers:** In 2007, an American Lung Association clinical trial found that the once-daily inhaler Advair, fluticasone plus salmeterol, can be just as effective in treating patients suffering from mild persistent asthma as others that must be inhaled twice a day. Patients will only have to inhale this medication once a day, meaning fewer prescription refills.

According to the American Lung Association's chief medical officer, Norman H. Edelman, MD, "Effective, less intensive alternatives may lead to greater adherence among patients, which would mean better asthma control with a minimum of medication, the goal of asthma treatment."

**Asthma misinformation found from survey:** An American Lung Association survey of parents of children with asthma provided surprising results. Over half of the parents did not know if their state had a law allowing students to carry their own "quick relief" or "rescue" medications. Forty-six states and the District of Columbia allow students to have their inhalers with them in case of an emergency. However, many parents (74.4 percent) responded that their child's school does not allow students to keep inhalers with them during the school day.

Although asthma attacks can be treated more quickly if children keep their inhalers with them, not all children should hold their own medicine at school. "It depends on their maturity level, understanding of the symptoms and when they need medication, and their willingness to follow the school's policies about carrying medication," says Dr. Edelman.

Connecticut, Louisiana, South Dakota, and Vermont are the only states that do not allow students to carry and use asthma inhalers while at school. In such cases, if a child should have an asthma attack or other asthma symptoms, the school can call a parent who can bring the quick relief inhaler, the child can get her inhaler when she goes home from school, or the school can call an ambulance. For more information on asthma research, visit [lungusa.org](http://lungusa.org).