

# The Facts of Asthma

## What is Asthma?

The word “asthma” comes from a Greek word that means “to pant”. Asthma is a chronic inflammatory disease of the airways.

- Chronic means you will have it forever
- Inflammatory means swelling

This may sound scary, but the great news is that Asthma can be controlled, but like everything in life, you need a plan.



## Why Me?

We aren't sure exactly why some people have asthma and some don't. There is a hereditary link (someone else in your family may have it too) and there is also an environmental link (something you come in contact with in your surroundings may lead to asthma)

## What is happening in my lungs?

When your body senses a trigger (something that bothers your breathing) is around; it wants to warn you so you can get away from it. The muscles on the outside of the airways start to twitch **and the tissue on the inside of the airways starts to swell**. When this happens, mucus gets trapped inside the breathing tubes. This makes it very hard to breathe and can feel like you are breathing through a straw.

Normal  
Airways



Asthma  
Airways

## How do I know my asthma is acting up?

There are four main symptoms of asthma. Everyone is different, so you may have one, some or all of the symptoms.

- Shortness of breath (you can't catch your breath)
- Wheezing (you hear a whistle sound when you **breathe**)
- Cough
- Chest tightness / heaviness (you feel like there is a weight on your chest and you can't take a deep breath)



## What do these puffers do?

There are two types of asthma medicines; **Relievers** and **Preventers**. This means that each medicine has a different job to do in your lungs. Both are needed to keep you feeling well and symptom free.

The **Relievers** are a rescue medicine. The **Relievers** relax the muscles on the outside of your breathing tubes and work quickly (usually within 15 minutes). You should take this medicine when you are having symptoms or if you know you are going to have trouble (such as before exercising). Think of them like Tylenol / Advil. If you need them every day, you should tell your doctor / asthma educator to try and figure out why.

The **Preventers** are what keep you well. The **Preventers** reduce the swelling / inflammation on the inside of your breathing tubes. They take a while to work in your system (usually about 2 weeks) and are meant to be taken every day. Do not stop them when you start to feel better! Think of them like a daily vitamin...they need to be taken regularly to keep you well and they don't work as well if you only take them when you are sick.

## How often do I need to take these puffers?

It is important to follow your asthma educator's / doctor's advice when it comes to your medications. The Relievers work quickly so, therefore, should only be taken if they are needed, while the Preventers normally need to be taken regularly to keep them in your system. Most times, the Preventers are prescribed once or twice daily.



## What if I don't want to take puffers?

Let's face it...most of us don't want to take medication every day, so it is very important to figure out what your triggers are and see if you can avoid them. If you know smoking bothers your breathing, the best thing for you would be to quit smoking / avoid smokers and second hand smoke. If scents trigger your symptoms, avoid using scented products at home and ask the people around you to reduce the amount of scent they use / wear. This being said, we can't live our lives in a bubble because there are triggers around us that we can't avoid. These are the reasons we take medications.

Be honest with your asthma educator / doctor. **The better we know you, the better plan we can suggest for you.** When do you find it easiest to use your medications? Is there a device that works better for your lifestyle than the others? Do you have other health problems that may be making your asthma worse? This information will help you and your asthma educator decide what the best plan is for you and your asthma!

