

## **How Well Are You Breathing?**

Do you ever wonder why you are having a hard time breathing? Maybe you ask yourself why you are constantly out of breath when you do anything physical even though you are “in shape.” The underlying answer to these and other questions like these may be that you suffer from asthma. What is asthma? Asthma is a chronic inflammatory disorder of the airway that leads to obstruction of airflow. Many people suffer from asthma; some people know they have it and others are unaware that their symptoms are actually asthma. Asthma syndromes can be caused by exercise, external allergic reactions, internal allergic reactions, external non-allergenic, aspirin sensitivity, or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Asthma symptoms either develop immediately or up to 4-6 hours later. You may be asking yourself what to look for when wondering if you may suffer from asthma. Classic characteristics are episodic wheezing, difficulty breathing, chest tightness, and dry cough. Often, people do not experience wheezing even though their provider can hear wheezing with a stethoscope. Symptoms tend to be worse at night and if you suffer from a chronic cough for greater than one month, this too could be asthma, among a few other things.

The goal in treating asthma is to decrease the number of asthma attacks one experiences, by minimizing chronic symptoms, preventing recurring attacks, and maintaining near normal pulmonary function. Different types of medication are used in order to obtain the desired results. Some medications have a long acting anti-inflammatory effect to help prevent asthma in those who suffer from severe asthma exacerbations. Other medications, used for acute exacerbations, are short acting drugs, which open up the airways by causing them to dilate. How each patient with asthma is treated depends on the severity of the patient's baseline pulmonary function and the severity of attacks on the pulmonary function. A good rule of thumb is that if you are using your short acting inhaler (albuterol) more than twice a week, you probably need a preventive medicine that you take every day. Research has found that the best way to control asthma is to check a measurement called a “peak flow.” This measures your lung function. By checking this daily, a patient can pick up a decline in lung function long before it becomes dangerous. Daily evaluation by the patient using a peak flow meter to determine their pulmonary function is very important and is being better implemented as an important part of the treatment of asthma.

Are you reading this, realizing you too suffer from some of these symptoms listed? By seeing your health care providers you could begin living a better life with better breathing. So stop suffering from lack of air and ask your health care professional about asthma so you can start breathing a new life!

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