

# BETTER HEALTH 4 YOU

SMART LOCAL 36 BENEFIT FUND

ASTHMA, ALLERGIES & COPD

## Anatomy of an Asthma Attack



### How to Avoid an Asthma Emergency

Asthma Attacks rarely happen without warning. Knowing the signs of a pending attack could help you prevent an asthma emergency. In fact, acting quickly could save your life.



### Asthma Early Warning Signs

- A lack of appetite, fatigue, headache, or coughing often comes before an asthma attack.
- Trouble sleeping and feeling tired are other typical signs.
- So are dark circles under the eyes and less tolerance for exercise.



### A Persistent Cough

Signs of an asthma attack can change from one attack to the next. One time there may be little or no coughing before an attack. The next time, there may be a persistent cough, especially at night. An Asthma cough is usually dry and hacking. A chronic or persistent cough that doesn't disappear after other cold symptoms are gone could point to asthma. Avoid taking cough medicine. Cough medicine won't help the asthma.



### Measurable Changes in Breathing

A peak flow meter can alert you to a pending attack. Be sure you always know your baseline measurement that reflects your best breathing.

- If your peak flow shows numbers between 50% and 80% of your personal best,

### Asthma Resources

Allergy & Asthma  
Network Mothers of  
Asthmatics  
2751 Prosperity  
Avenue, Suite 150  
Fairfax, VA 22031  
(800) 878-4403

American Lung  
Association  
61 Broadway, 6th  
Floor  
New York, NY 10006  
(212) 315-8700

Asthma and Allergy  
Foundation of America  
1233 20th St NW,  
Suite 402  
Washington, DC  
20636  
(202) 466-7643

an asthma attack has probably started.

- A number below 50% means an emergency that needs immediate attention, call 911
- Call 911 if you have trouble walking or talking due to shortness of breath, or if your lips are blue or gray.

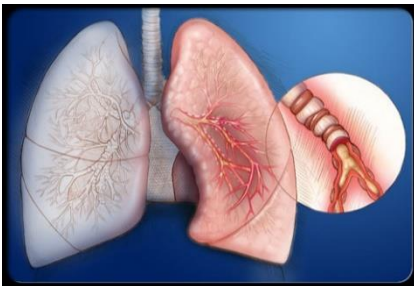


**Follow Your Asthma Action Plan**

([cdc.gov/ASTHMA/actionplan.html](http://cdc.gov/ASTHMA/actionplan.html))

An action plan tells you how to deal with symptoms of an asthma attack.

- Based on peak flow measures, an asthma plan shows you what medicines to take and when. It's important to follow the plan and use the medications exactly as prescribed.
- If the symptoms get worse after following the action plan, call your asthma doctor. Also, follow the plan's emergency instructions.



**Breathing Difficulties**

During an asthma attack, muscles around the airways tighten, and the airway linings swell.

- Too much mucus secretion is produced in the airways and can block the air tubes in the lungs.

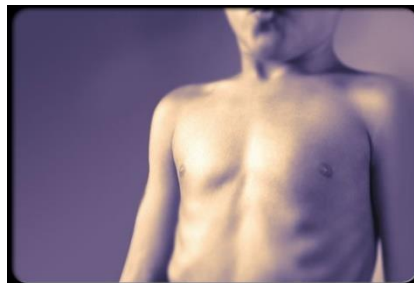
- Air is trapped in the lungs and breathing becomes difficult.

You might notice symptoms of wheezing at first. But as attacks get worse there's more chest tightness and shortness of breath. Eventually, you might feel like you can't get enough air.



**Posture Changes**

The effort to breathe may make someone with severe breathing difficulties lean forward and speak in words instead of sentences, and become noticeably agitated. As the severity increases, an asthma sufferer may increasingly move into a hunched-over sitting position with their hands supporting their body. This is called the tripod position.



**Chest and Neck Retractions**

When it's hard to breathe, the tissue in the chest and neck may sink in with each breath. This is called retraction.

Retractions mean that not enough air is getting into the lungs, and are signs of a medical emergency. Call 911 or see a doctor right away. In children other signs of deterioration in breathing are:

- Poor appetite
- Fatigue
- Decreased activity



**Blue Lips or Fingernails**

Blue or gray lips or fingernails are a sign of not enough oxygen in the blood. The condition is called cyanosis. Cyanosis is an emergency situation. Call 911 as soon as possible.



**Other Signs of Asthma Emergencies**

If you notice any of the following, get emergency help at once:

- Difficulty talking
- Inability to exhale or inhale
- Shortness of breath
- Feelings of anxiety or panic
- Coughing that won't stop
- Pale, sweaty face

Call me anytime with questions

Mary Beth Cyliax, RN, CCM

314-652-8175 ext. 310