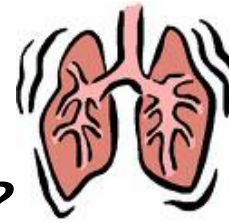




What is Asthma?



Take a long, deep breath — right now. Inhale slowly, until your lungs can't hold anymore . . . now let the air out gradually . . . ahhh. Breathing feels so natural that it's easy to take for granted, isn't it?

Normally, the air you breathe travels effortlessly through your nose and mouth, down the trachea (also called the "windpipe"), through the bronchial tubes into the lungs, and finally to tiny clusters of air sacs, called alveoli. Here, oxygen is exchanged for carbon dioxide in your blood.

That's what it feels like when someone tries to breathe during an [asthma flare-up](#) (also called an asthma attack, flare, episode, or exacerbation). During a flare-up, the airways narrow and become obstructed, making it difficult for air to move through them. Asthma can be very scary — and when not controlled, it can be life-threatening.

More than 20 million people have asthma in the United States. In fact, it's the No. 1 reason for kids chronically missing school. And asthma flare-ups are the most common cause of pediatric emergency room visits due to a chronic illness.

Some kids have only mild, occasional symptoms or only show symptoms after exercising. Others have severe asthma that, left untreated, can dramatically limit how active they are and cause changes in lung function.

But thanks to new medications and treatment strategies, kids with asthma no longer need to sit on the sidelines, and parents no longer need to worry incessantly about their child's well being.

With patient education and the right asthma management plan, families can learn to control symptoms and asthma flare-ups more independently, allowing kids and parents to do just about anything they want.

http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/asthma_basics/what/asthma_basics.html