ASTHMA: A VERY SERIOUS, BUT EASILY MANAGEABLE DISEASE

What is asthma?
- A chronic lung disease that inflames and narrows the airways of your lungs
- Causes a variety of symptoms that make breathing difficult
- If left untreated, it can damage the airways
- With proper awareness and treatment, can be easily managed

What causes asthma?
- The exact cause is unknown
- Research suggests genetic and environmental factors interact to cause asthma
- Factors leading to asthma may include: inherited tendency to develop allergies, parents with asthma, certain respiratory infections in childhood, contact with some airborne allergens, or exposure to some viral infections during development of the immune system
- Contact with certain chemical irritants or industrial dusts in the workplace may cause occupational asthma
- Airway inflammation makes airway tissues irritated, red, and swollen, and may become plugged with mucus decreasing airflow
- Constriction, occurring on top of inflammation, makes breathing even harder

Signs and symptoms:  Wheezing, coughing, chest pain or tightness, shortness of breath

Risk Factors
- Having allergies, eczema, parents or siblings with asthma, being a smoker or second-hand smoke exposure, obesity, exposure to environmental triggers such as pollution, fumes, chemicals, etc.

How can I get diagnosed and treated?
- Doctors can diagnose asthma with a lung function test, questions about medical history, and a physical exam
- Treatment depends on the level of severity: whether it’s intermittent, mild, moderate, or severe
- In serious cases, you may be advised to see an asthma specialist
- Treatments includes: long term control (inhalers, injections, nebulizers, or medicine taken by mouth) or quick relief medicines (inhalers)

What steps can I take to prevent asthma flare ups?
- Avoid asthma triggers (exposure to pollens, air pollution, animal fur, cigarette smoke, or certain sprays like hairspray)
- Track and record your symptoms
- Get regular asthma check-ups
- Use a peak flow meter: a device given to you by your doctor that shows how well air moves out of your lungs
- Even if exercising causes shortness of breath, DO NOT avoid physical activity; just be sure to talk with your doctor about medicines you can take that will allow you to remain active

When is it time to see a health care provider?
- Coughing or trouble breathing while exercising, after changes in outside temperature, causing trouble sleeping at night, or during exposure to animals, dust, pollen, or other allergen triggers
- Wheezing noises inside your chest when you breath

Emergency care:
- Call your doctor for advice if: your medications don’t relieve an asthma attack or your peak flow is less than half of your personal best peak flow number
- CALL 9–1–1 if you have persistent shortness of breath, feel dizzy, or any other concerning symptoms that might suggest a severe asthma attack. An asthma attack can occur quickly so getting to the emergency room quickly is critical.

http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/asthma/
http://www.asthma.com/learn/what-is-asthma.html
www.mayoclinic.com

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