

## What is asthma?

Asthma is a serious lung condition that affects your airways. Your airways are the tubes that carry air into and out of the lungs. If you have asthma, the inside walls of your airways are inflamed (swollen). This makes the airways more sensitive and more likely to react to "triggers" or things in the environment that can cause asthma symptoms. Triggers can be allergens, irritants, or things such as changes in weather. When someone with asthma comes into contact with a trigger, the airways react in three ways:

- The inside lining of the airways becomes swollen and irritated
- The muscles around the airways tighten
- The inside of the airways fill up with extra mucus

This reaction is called an asthma attack. When an episode occurs, it is very difficult to breathe.



Breathe New Hampshire has served the people of New Hampshire since 1916. Through education, advocacy, research, and partnerships, we are working to eliminate lung disease and improve the quality of life for those living with lung disease in New Hampshire.

We invite you to join us as a volunteer, partner, or donor, so that we can continue to strengthen our efforts.



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# Asthma



GET THE FACTS



## Why do people get asthma?

The causes of asthma are not completely understood, but we do know that asthma runs in families. Being exposed to secondhand smoke and infections early in life can also increase the risk of developing asthma. Asthma can begin at any age and can change over time.



## What are the signs and symptoms of asthma?

- Coughing, especially at night, in the morning, or after activity
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness (one of the first signs that your asthma is getting worse)
- Wheezing (a high-pitched whistling sound when you breathe out)

Asthma triggers and symptoms can be different for every person. Some people may have to manage daily symptoms, while others may only have to manage symptoms at certain times of the year.

## What can cause an asthma attack?

An asthma attack occurs when your airways react to *triggers* or things that make your asthma symptoms worse. Some common triggers include dust mites, pollen, other inhaled irritants and catching a cold. Asthma triggers can be different for everyone. Knowing which asthma triggers are a problem is the first step in controlling your asthma.

## How is asthma diagnosed?

Asthma can be diagnosed only by a health care professional. It is very important to tell your health care professional if you are having difficulty breathing (even if it is only sometimes) or if you have a cough that does not go away.

## What are the treatments for asthma?

To be in control of asthma, it is important that you take your asthma medicines as directed by your health care professional. There are two types of medicine for treating asthma: *long-term control medicines* are taken every day and *quick-relief medicines*, sometimes called “rescue” medicines, are taken when you are having asthma symptoms.

SMART treatment stands for Single Maintenance and Reliever Therapy and allows patients with moderate to severe asthma to take one medication to control both maintenance and relief or rescue needs.



## Why is it important to control your asthma?

Uncontrolled asthma can lead to permanent lung damage or acute serious illness. Over time, the constant swelling of the airways can cause scarring. These changes in the airways can cause your lungs to not work as well.

## Is there a cure for asthma?

Asthma cannot be cured, but all asthma can be controlled. Good asthma control allows you to lead a healthy, active lifestyle and have few or no symptoms.

For facts and resources about asthma in New Hampshire, please visit [www.cdc.gov/asthma](http://www.cdc.gov/asthma).

For more information, visit our website at [BreatheNH.org](http://BreatheNH.org) or call 603.669.2411.