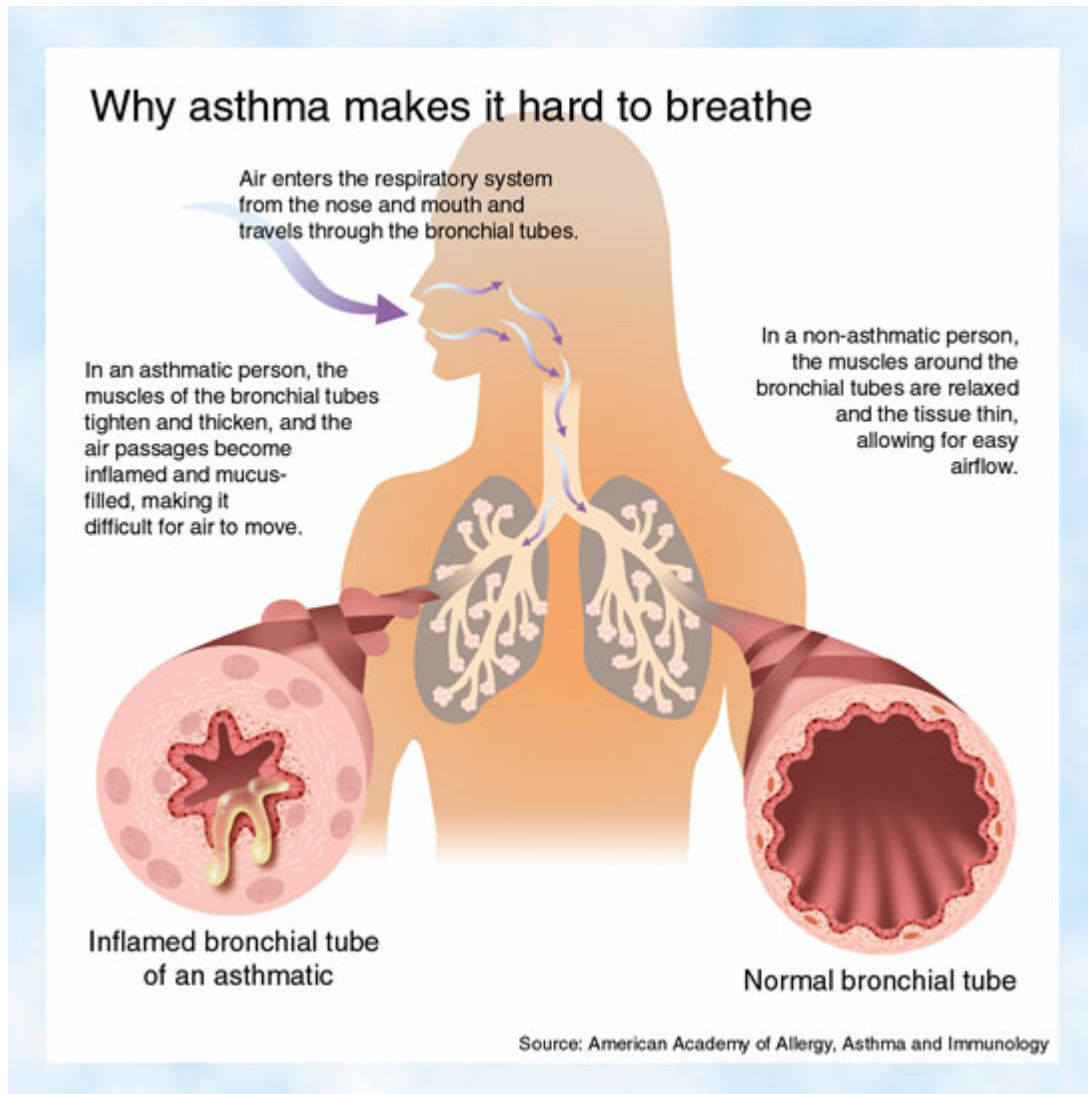


What is asthma?

Asthma is a lifelong disease affecting the bronchial tubes that carry air to the lungs. These tubes are also called airways. With asthma, breathing is sometimes difficult due to the following changes in the airways:

- Swelling of the lining in the airways (inflammation)
- Extra mucus in the airways
- Tightening of the muscles around the airways (muscle spasm)



Asthma is not contagious. It cannot be cured, but it can be controlled with daily medications. Although asthma is a **chronic** (lifelong) disease, anyone with asthma can have an **acute** (sudden) attack of symptoms. Even if your child has no symptoms, children with asthma almost always have some inflammation/swelling in the airways. Therefore, there is always a chance that an attack could occur. Although asthma is a chronic disease, the severity of asthma can change over the years. There may be months or years when your child needs daily medications for asthma, but there may also be periods of time when your child doesn't need these medications.

Recognizing an Asthma Attack

- **Wheezing:** A tight, whistling or musical sound heard with each breath, mainly when breathing out, which may indicate that the air passages are narrower, making it more difficult to breathe.
- **Coughing:** Often repeated, interfering with your child's sleep or activities.
- **Shortness of breath:** In young children who cannot tell you they are short of breath, you may notice faster breathing, flaring of the nostrils, retractions (where the chest appears to sink in just below the neck, under the breastbone and ribs, and/or between each rib with each breath) or difficulty speaking in full sentences.
- **Tightness in the chest:** Older children may complain of chest pain or tightness.
- **Decreased activity** due to difficulty breathing

What Causes an Asthma Attack?

Triggers can lead to asthma attacks. Triggers are things which make asthma symptoms worse. Every child has different triggers. Your doctor will help you identify your child's triggers. Some examples include:

- Infections of the airways such as colds or pneumonia
- Allergies
- Irritants (such as pollution or cigarette smoke) in the air we breathe
- Exercise
- Stress

How do I reduce asthma attacks?

- Follow your asthma plan given to you by your child's doctor.
- Give quick-relief and controller medicines as directed.
- Keep your child away from smoke and known triggers, if possible.
- Consult your doctor if your child's symptoms worsen or do not respond to your usual treatment plan.