

Asthma Definition and Symptoms

Asthma is a chronic inflammatory disease of the airways in the lungs. Inflammation in the airways makes the lungs more sensitive to substances in the environment, typically termed “asthma triggers.” When people with asthma are exposed to their triggers, they may experience a narrowing of the airways (resulting from the contraction [squeezing] of the airway muscles), increased airway inflammation, and extra mucus production, making breathing more difficult. Narrowing of the airways causes people to experience asthma symptoms.

Asthma symptoms include:

- difficulty breathing;
- coughing;
- wheezing (whistle sound);
- chest tightness; and
- shortness of breath.

Not all people with asthma have the same triggers. Triggers can bring on an asthma attack, which can be life-threatening if left untreated. Physical activity is a common asthma trigger in children and youth. Exposure to other common asthma triggers can occur during physical activity and steps should be taken to reduce exposure to:

- extremes in weather (cold, hot, wind, high humidity);
- poor air quality;
- dusty gym mats;
- high pollen days (trees, grasses, flowers, weeds);
- mould (found in decaying leaves, water-damaged areas, areas around swimming pools and skating rinks); and

- strong smelling cleaning products (chlorine and ammonia-based products).