

Asthma- Getting Better Control *By Wesley Vaughn, MD*

Asthma affects at least 300 million people globally and has steadily increased in prevalence since the 1970's. It is estimated that at least 5 percent of the U.S. population lives with this chronic condition and approximately 4,000 people die from it each year. With a pro-active approach asthma can be a manageable condition.

Multiple genes have been implicated in causing asthma but it is believed that environmental factors significantly affect the severity of the symptoms. Respiratory symptoms such as coughing, wheezing, chest tightness and shortness of breath can increase or decrease over time and may be sporadic.

The primary test to establish the diagnosis of asthma is called spirometry which can be performed in an outpatient setting to determine the severity of airway obstruction. Home peak flow meters can be used to monitor symptoms in relation to lung function in those who may have insidious symptoms.

It is important to remember that proper use of medications from your physician can help control asthma. Taking extra care to avoid pre-determined triggers may help to reduce flairs

as well. Pollen, pet dander or mold can be factors to avoid if identified as an asthma trigger. Asthma can also be aggravated by exposure to tobacco smoke, pollution, perfumes and weather changes. Those with asthma should be extra cautious during extremes of heat, humidity or cold.

Viral and bacterial infections can worsen asthma especially during flu season. Adults and children with asthma are more likely to develop pneumonia after the flu than people who do not have asthma. A yearly influenza vaccine is recommended to those with asthma six months of age and older. Some medications such as ibuprofen (non-steroidal anti inflammatory drugs) and non-selective beta blockers may worsen asthma.

Asthma has various causes in different people and therefore individualized therapy is an essential approach. Environmental control measures are an important part of asthma management as well as taking prescribed medications. A partnership between you and your health care provider with an asthma action plan can provide a superior outcome and improve quality of life.

If you have further questions about asthma symptoms or treatment, talk to your healthcare provider on your next visit.

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