

What is Asthma?

Asthma is a chronic inflammatory disease of the lung's air passages (breathing tubes) that can make breathing difficult. During normal breathing, air moves in and out of the lungs through air passages, bringing oxygen and carbon dioxide in and out of the body.

Two things occur in the lungs with asthma:

Inflammation (irritation): Air flow is obstructed (blocked) by inflammation (swelling), which thickens the airway walls and creates mucus and phlegm inside the airways.

Constriction: Muscle spasms constrict and tighten the airways and cause the air passages to become narrow, making it harder for air to get in and out.

There is no cure for asthma and it will not go away, but there are very good treatments to control it. People with asthma can enjoy a normal healthy life and participate in normal activities.

Symptoms of an asthma flare up include:

- Wheezing – a whistling noise made when breathing
- Coughing
- Chest tightness that makes it hard to breath
- Waking up at night coughing
- Extra phlegm and mucus

Asthma flare-ups can be caused by many different triggers. Asthma flare-ups often have early warning signs; however, asthma flare-ups can also come on suddenly and progress rapidly. You must be ready to treat them quickly and correctly. If asthma is not treated well and kept under control, it can cause problems, including:

- Frequent visits to your health care provider or emergency room and even hospitalization
- Inability to participate in sports and other physical activity
- Missed school days or work days
- Lung damage and, in severe cases, death

There are good medications that can help treat asthma spasms and inflammation caused by asthma and control asthma symptoms. It is important to work with your health care provider and asthma educator to keep your asthma under control.

For more asthma resources visit pamf.org/asthma

