

Title: Asthma and Oral Steroids: Treatment for Asthma Attacks in Children

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Date: July 15, 2009

Key words: Asthma, Asthma exacerbation, Asthma Treatment, Oral Steroids

Abstract: Asthma is a disease that affects airways, the pipes that carry air to a patient's lungs. With asthma, when airways are irritated they swell and narrow. During an asthma attack, or exacerbation, this narrowing makes it hard to breathe. Some patients experience wheezing, coughing and chest tightness. This pamphlet explains what triggers and asthma attack and outlines asthma treatment, including oral steroids.

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Family Medicine Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up to date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.

## Are Oral Steroids Safe?



Oral steroids are different from illegal anabolic steroids taken by certain athletes. They are safe when prescribed by a doctor. They have some side effects, like all other medications, but the benefits of treating asthma outweigh the risk of side effects.

### Common side effects include

- Increased appetite and slight weight gain
- Nervousness, restlessness and insomnia
- Mild acne

### Serious side effects (get medical help)

- Blurred vision or decreased vision
- Increased thirst and frequent urination
- Fever or sore throat
- Mood changes
- Skin rash
- Muscle cramps and leg swelling

For more information about Asthma ...

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America  
[www.aafa.org](http://www.aafa.org)

American Lung Association  
[www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org)

National Heart Lung and Blood Institute  
[www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

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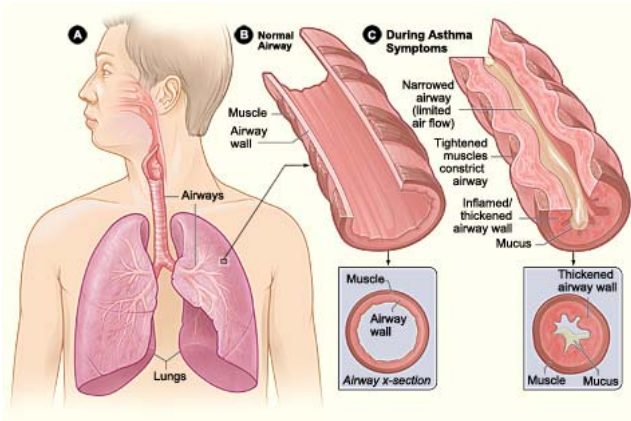
## Asthma and Oral Steroids Treatment for Asthma Attacks in Children



**University of Minnesota  
Family Medicine Rotation  
Patient Education Tool**

## What is Asthma?

Asthma is a disease that affects the lungs and the airways (pipes that carry air to a patient's lungs). The airways of children with asthma are sensitive to different allergens (things they are allergic to).



(www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

## What is an Asthma Attack (Exacerbation)?

When allergens irritate the lungs, airways begin to swell up and spasm. This causes the airways to narrow and produce mucus. Narrowing and mucus block air from getting to your lungs. Symptoms of an asthma attack include coughing, wheezing, chest tightness and difficulty breathing.



## Things that Trigger Asthma Attacks

- Pollen & Mold
- Animals & Pets
- Second Hand Tobacco Smoke
- Dust Mites
- Exercise
- Perfume
- Sinus infections or cold viruses
- Being emotional
- Temperature changes

**Get medical help immediately if your child ...**

- Is breathing with extreme difficulty**
- Has blue fingernails or lips**
- Flares their nostrils while breathing**

## Asthma Treatment

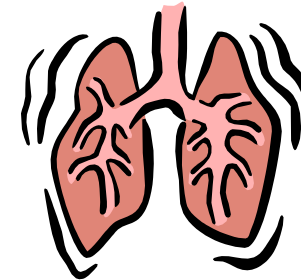
There are two groups of medicines to treat asthma: medicines that help prevent an asthma attack (controller medicines) and medicines to treat an attack (rescue medicines).

© Your doctor will work with you to create an "Asthma Action Plan" which outlines the best medicine(s) for your child ☺

\***Controller Medicines** are taken on a regular basis, even when your child is not having symptoms.  
-Inhaled corticosteroids (Pulmicort).

\***Rescue Medicines** are taken only during an asthma attack.

- Inhaled bronchodilators (Albuterol)
- Oral Steroids (Prednisone or Prednisolone).



## How do Steroids Work?

Steroids decrease inflammation and swelling in airways. This helps open up airways so air can get to the lungs. During an asthma attack, your child's airways are more swollen and narrow than normal. They may need a higher dose of steroids in pill form.