

Title: Asthma Exacerbations: Triggers and Treatment

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Abstract: Asthma exacerbations can be triggered by many different factors, commonly allergens, respiratory infections, environmental irritants, smoke exposure, and anxiety or stress. Bacterial infections, such as *Chlamydia* and *Mycoplasma*, infrequently contribute to asthma exacerbations. Exacerbations are usually treated with medications like beta agonists and corticosteroids. Antibiotic usage is only recommended if co-morbid conditions are present, such as suspicion of bacterial sinusitis, evidence of pneumonia, or purulent sputum.

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Primary Care 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.



## When to go to the doctor?

\*Your asthma action plan will help you decide when to come to the doctor or emergency room such as:

\*If symptoms are not improving with your home medications

\*If you are so short of breath you can't speak

\*If your heart is racing very fast

\*If you are constantly wheezing

## *For Further Information*

National Heart Lung and Blood Institute

[www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

US Environmental Protection Agency  
asthma publications

<http://www.epa.gov/asthma/publications.html>

American Academy of Allergy Asthma  
and Immunology

<http://www.aaaai.org/>

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of  
America

<http://www.aafa.org/>

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## **Asthma Exacerbations:**

Causes and Treatment



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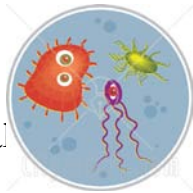
Patient Education Tool

## Asthma Triggers

All of the items in the list can lead to an asthma attack:

\*allergens—like pollen, mold, pets, or foods

\*respiratory infections—bacterial or viral



\*environmental irritants—cleaning sprays, perfumes, air pollution, changing weather patterns

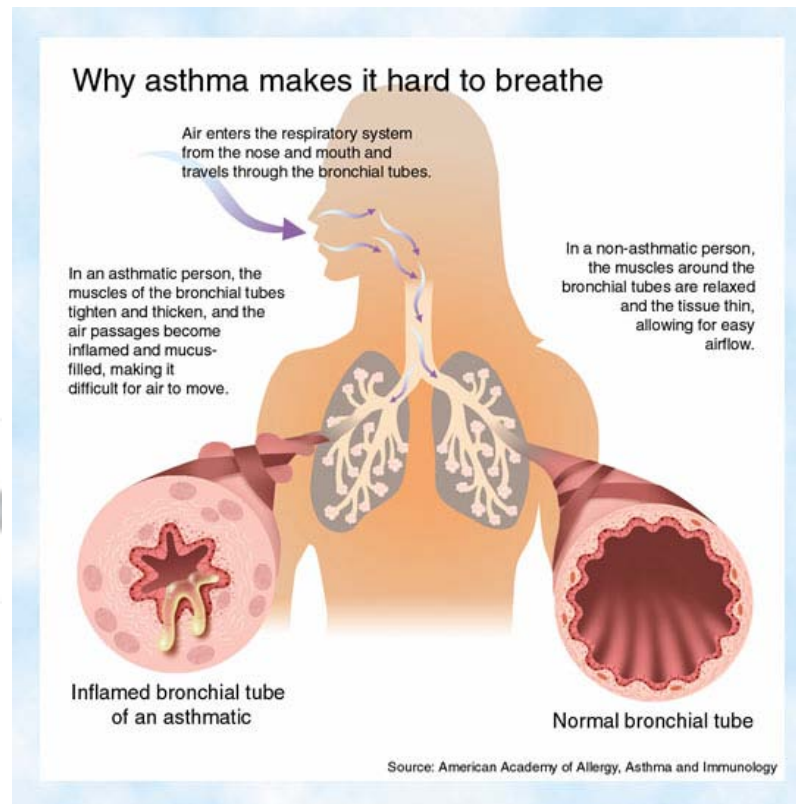
\*smoke



\*exercise

\*heartburn or reflux

\*anxiety or stress



## Asthma Exacerbations

An asthma attack or exacerbation is an over-reaction of your lungs and airways to certain triggers like those listed to the right.

This causes your airways to swell up, produce more mucus, and for the muscles to tighten.

You may notice that it is harder to breathe and speak, and that you are coughing and wheezing.

## Asthma Treatment

\* The best treatment is prevention! To avoid an asthma attack, recognize the triggers that set you off and try to avoid them.

\*Your doctor will work with you to set up an asthma action plan, which details what to do depending on the type of symptoms you have.

\*Use a daily medication to help keep your asthma in good control, like an albuterol inhaler.

\*During attacks, your doctor may prescribe inhalers or nebulizers and an oral steroid.

\*Rarely, your asthma attack may be caused by a bacterial infection. Only then would your doctor prescribe antibiotics.