

B.8 ASTHMA

Asthma is a condition in which the person's airways become narrow and swell and produce extra mucus. This can make breathing difficult and trigger coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath.

For some people, asthma is a minor nuisance. For others, it can be a major problem that interferes with daily activities and may lead to a life-threatening asthma attack.

Asthma may not be cured, but its symptoms can be controlled. Person may be known to have asthma and prescribed medications. This can be established by taking history from the casualty.

B.8.1 WHAT DO I SEE AND ENQUIRE?



Following signs can be seen in a person having an asthma attack:

- The person has difficulty in breathing.
- The person experiences as if he does not get enough air.
- Sometimes the person breathes rapidly or coughs. In some cases he coughs up mucus.
- The breathing makes a whistling or wheezing sound when exhaling.
- The person complains of tightness or pain in the chest.
- The person has troubled sleeping due to the shortness of breath.
- Symptoms of asphyxia (grey blue tinge of lips and nail-beds).
- If the attack lasts long, exhaustion may occur.

B.8.2 WHAT DO I DO?

B.8.2.1 SUPPORT THE PERSON WITH THE ASTHMA ATTACK

1. Stay calm and reassure the person.
2. Let the person adopt a position that he finds most comfortable. In many cases this is sitting up in bed or on a chair, leaning forward on a couple of pillows or a small table on which he rests his head.

Do not make the person lie down. Important however it is important the person adopts the position he finds best.



3. If the person is used to take inhaler puffs for his condition, let him take the medication.
4. Ensure fresh air by opening a window. Loosen any tight clothing.
5. If it is the first attack or the attack is severe or the inhaler puffs have no effect, seek urgent medical help in a healthcare facility.
6. If the person loses consciousness, make sure the airway remains open and check the breathing.
7. If the person stops breathing, start CPR.

B.8.2.2 HYGIENE

Always wash your hands after taking care of a person. Use soap and water to wash your hands. If no soap is available, you can use ash to wash your hands. Alcohol-based sanitizers can also be used, if available.

B.8.3 WHEN TO REFER PERSON WITH ASTHMA TO A HEALTHCARE FACILITY?



Always urgently transport the person with an asthma crisis to the nearest healthcare facility if the asthma crisis continues even after the person took his medication or if his condition deteriorates.



Always advise the person known to be treated for asthma to visit the healthcare facility as soon as possible after the asthma crisis for further follow-up and treatment.