

Understanding Asthma and Other Health Conditions



Some health problems happen more often in people with asthma. The problems can make asthma symptoms worse. Symptoms can be harder to control. Talk with your healthcare provider about how other health problems might be affecting your asthma. And ask your healthcare provider for help quitting if you do smoke. Smoking makes your asthma and other health problems worse.

Upper respiratory problems

Problems with your nose, sinuses, or throat can make your asthma symptoms worse. These upper respiratory problems can include a cold, sore throat, and the flu.



You can help to prevent these illnesses by washing your hands often. Also try to stay away from people who are sick. You and others around you should cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing. You can also use a hand cleaner. Make sure that has at least 60% alcohol in it if you can't wash your hands with soap and water. Many offices and businesses have them available for use. You can also keep small bottles at work, in your car, or in your purse. And stay up-to-date on vaccines, as directed by your healthcare provider. Get a flu shot every year.

Many people with asthma also have long-term problems with their nose (rhinitis) or sinuses (chronic sinusitis). These problems can give you a runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, sore throat, or coughing. Or even a headache. These problems may also make your asthma worse. The symptoms may be from infections or allergies. (See Allergies below.) Tell your healthcare provider if you have any of these symptoms. There are medicines and other treatments available.

Lower respiratory problems

Some long-term (chronic) lower respiratory problems that can affect asthma include COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), bronchopulmonary aspergillosis, and vocal cord dysfunction.

Conditions in children that could be linked to asthma include:

- RSV (respiratory syncytial virus)
- Breathing in an object that gets stuck in the airways or lungs. This is called foreign object aspiration.

- Bronchopulmonary dysplasia. This is a chronic lung condition that is often due to being born prematurely.
- Cystic fibrosis

Talk with your healthcare provider if you were diagnosed with any of these health conditions as an adult or as a child. Ask about available treatments to help manage asthma.

Allergies

Asthma may be set off by allergies. Allergies are caused by things in the environment that you breathe in. These are called allergens. The allergens that cause asthma in some people are commonly found indoors and outdoors. For example, some people are allergic to dust, animals, or insects. The best thing you can do is try to stay away from those things that make your asthma worse. That isn't easy. Your healthcare provider may advise allergy testing. This can help you learn what is causing your asthma to get worse. Talk with your provider if allergies are found. They can help you figure out ways to reduce your contact with your allergens. They can also discuss treatment choices for allergic asthma.

Acid reflux

Many people with asthma also have acid reflux. This is also called gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). GERD occurs when stomach acid backs up in the tube that carries food to the stomach (the esophagus). This acid can irritate your airways. The symptoms of GERD may be heartburn, a sour taste, coughing, or a hoarse voice. Symptoms may be worse at night if you have asthma. Your healthcare provider can advise treatment. This may include changes in your diet. Or in your medicine.

Being overweight

Asthma may be worse in people who are overweight. Losing weight may help ease your asthma symptoms. It is also a hard thing to do. Your healthcare provider can advise treatment to help you lose weight. Important parts of a plan to reach a health weight include making healthy food choices and exercising every day. Having emotional support from friends and family is important too.

Obstructive sleep apnea

Obstructive sleep apnea is a blockage in the airways. It causes trouble breathing during sleep. People with obstructive sleep apnea often snore very loudly. They sound like they stop breathing while they sleep. They also feel tired during the day. This is true even if they slept at night. It's more common in people who are overweight. But it can happen to anyone. It is also linked to some serious health problems. And it may be present in people with asthma that's hard to control. You may need tests to see if your symptoms are from asthma, obstructive sleep apnea, or both.

Stress and depression

Stress and depression can both make asthma harder to manage. Talk with your healthcare provider if you are having trouble dealing with stress. Also talk with your provider if you are having symptoms of depression. You can't get rid of all stress. But you can learn to manage it better. Many treatments can help depression. These can include counseling and medicines.

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