

All About Asthma

What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic lung disease that involves tightening of the airways, or bronchial tubes, that keeps air from moving as freely, and causes you to have symptoms such as shortness of breath or wheezing. The bronchial tubes also become inflamed, which means that they are red and swollen. In addition, the airways are twitchier and infection, irritants, or allergens may trigger an asthma attack.

What are the symptoms of asthma?

Asthma symptoms will come and go. The following are common symptoms, although you may not have all of them:

- Shortness of breath
- Coughing, which may be worse at night
- Wheezing
- Chest tightness

Who gets asthma?

Asthma is common – an estimated 14 to 15 million people in the United States have it. Most cases are diagnosed in childhood, but adults can also develop asthma. Often other family members have asthma too. It commonly occurs in people who also have allergies or eczema, or in whom these disorders run in the family.

What triggers asthma?

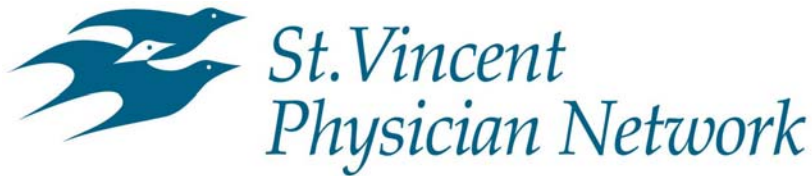
- Respiratory infections, especially viruses
- Allergens such as mold or pollen
- Environmental triggers like air pollution and tobacco smoke
- Certain medications
- Occupational irritants, for example, metal salts, wood dusts, and industrial chemicals
- Exercise
- Emotional stress

How is asthma treated?

Your doctor will choose the proper medications depending on how severe your asthma is. There are quick-acting “rescue” medications that act to decrease the twitchiness and open up the airways immediately. There are also slow-acting medicines that help to control inflammation over the long term. In a severe attack your doctor may prescribe steroid pills for extra help getting inflammation under control.

Can asthma be cured?

Asthma is a life-long or chronic condition. There is no cure; however, with treatment you can expect your symptoms to be controlled most of the time. If you are prescribed daily medications, it's important that you continue to take them even when you aren't having



any asthma symptoms. Your asthma should not limit your daily life; it should not interfere with school, work, or exercise. If it does, talk to your doctor.

How can I help prevent problems?

- Take your medicines as directed.
- Avoid things that can trigger your asthma.
- Plan ahead. Ask your doctor about developing an action plan for when your symptoms flare up.

When should I see a doctor?

Talk to your doctor if your symptoms are more frequent or more severe. If using your rescue inhaler does not relieve your symptoms call your doctor or visit the nearest emergency department.

--St. Vincent Physician Network offers 23 convenient locations throughout central Indiana. To find a St. Vincent Physician Network office near you, call 317.356.CARE or visit us online at physiciannetwork.stvincent.org.