



# NORTH TEXAS ALLERGY & ASTHMA ASSOCIATES

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## ASTHMA

### What is asthma?

Asthma is a lung condition that causes wheezing, coughing, and shortness of breath. It is caused by inflammation (swelling) of the lining of the airways in your lungs. Asthma is a chronic condition, which means you will probably have it the rest of your life. Some people have coughing or wheezing only during or after physical activity. This is called exercise-induced asthma. Asthma may be mild, moderate, or severe. An asthma attack may last a few minutes or for days and attacks can happen anywhere and at any time. Severe asthma attacks can be fatal. It is very important to get treatment for asthma so you can live a healthy, active life. About 12 million Americans have asthma, and the number of people who have asthma is increasing worldwide.

### How does it occur?

If you have asthma, the airways in your lungs are inflamed, even when you do not have any symptoms. When your airways are exposed to irritants or allergens, the airways become more swollen and begin to make excess mucus. The muscles in the walls of the airways begin to contract. These reactions cause the airway openings to become smaller, making it harder for air to move in and out. Wheezing is the sound of air moving through the narrowed air passages. The extra mucus in the airways causes coughing.

Often asthma attacks are triggered by everyday situation and environmental factors, which typically fall into three groups:

- **Allergens** – These make up the largest group of triggers. Pollen, animal dander, mold, mildew, cockroaches, and dust are common airborne triggers.
- **Irritants** – These include perfumes, household cleaning products, aerosol sprays, smoke, industrial chemicals, and air pollution. People with asthma may react to even a small amount of these substances.
- **Physical conditions** – Include such things as viral infections, colds, or flu that can cause flare-ups. Exercise, weather changes, cold air, and emotional stress are other triggers in this category.

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of asthma are:

- Wheezing
- Coughing
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness

### How is it diagnosed?

We will ask about your history of breathing problems and will do a physical exam. You may have one or more breathing tests. You may be tested before and after taking medication to measure your response to broncho-dilators. A single attack of wheezing does not necessarily mean that you have asthma. Certain infections and some chemicals can cause wheezing that lasts for a short time and then does not occur again.