

Asthma

Source: American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology

Asthma is a chronic disease that affects about 20 million Americans. Its primary cause is inflamed airways in the lungs. This inflammation makes the airways smaller, which makes it more difficult for air to move in and out of the lungs. Asthma is the most common serious disease among children. Nine million children in the United States have asthma.

Signs that you might have asthma include:

- Coughing
- Wheezing
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness

Many people have "allergic asthma," which means that allergens - like dust mites, mold, animal dander, pollen and cockroaches - make their symptoms worse.

Other things that can affect adult asthma include:

- Pregnancy: Uncontrolled asthma can harm the health of a mother and her baby.
- Work situations: Fumes, gases or dust that are inhaled at work can trigger asthma.
- Age: Older people with asthma face unique health challenges.
- Exercise: Some people may have asthma symptoms when they exercise.
- Medications: Medications like aspirin and ibuprofen, or beta-blockers (used to treat heart disease, high blood pressure, migraine headaches or glaucoma), may cause an asthma attack in some adults.

If you think you have asthma, you should talk to an allergist/immunologist - a doctor with special training to manage allergies and asthma.