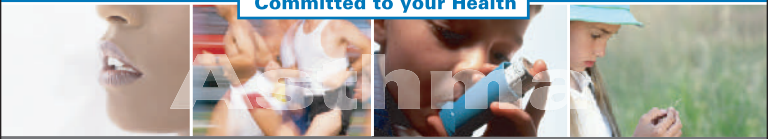




**Lindo's**  
PHARMACY

Committed to your Health



# Asthma

## ■ What are the symptoms of asthma?

Asthma is a condition where airways in the lungs are inflamed, causing constriction and narrowing. This, in turn, reduces airflow to the lungs resulting in symptoms of breathlessness, wheezing, coughing, congestion and tightness in the chest.

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## ■ What causes and triggers asthma?

Asthma is not just one disease. It covers a range of symptoms, severity, triggers and outcomes. It is very common and some statistics report that one in five children suffers with the condition. Asthma is also common among adults. There are many trigger factors. These include allergens in the home, mildew, dust, pollens, pet dander, air pollution, weather extremes, humidity, perfumes, second-hand smoke and viral infections (such as the common cold). Some medications, foods, exercise, stress and some work environments can also trigger an asthma attack. Asthma can also 'run in families'. Sometimes, symptoms of asthma can occur for no apparent reason.

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## ■ How is asthma diagnosed?

It is often difficult to diagnose asthma as its symptoms can easily be confused with other lung or even heart conditions. A careful medical history is essential, noting the kinds of symptoms, how long they last, what triggers them, and how severe they are. In addition, some simple tests can be used to help. The two types of breathing tests used to aid in diagnosis are peak-flow tests and spirometry. They measure how fast the air can flow through breathing tubes and based on this measure of speed, can estimate how congested and tight the airways are. Again, the best way to diagnose it is to take a thorough medical history.

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## ■ Can asthma be cured?

Though asthma is not considered a 'curable' condition, one can reduce the frequency and severity of asthma symptoms in quite a few ways. One of the most important and effective non-drug measures is avoiding allergens. The use of occlusive bedding is effective, though somewhat costly. It may also be helpful to remove carpets and use blinds instead of curtains. Put any fluffy toys in the deep freeze for 12 hours a week to help kill dust mites. Also, it may be necessary to avoid domestic pets and cigarette smoke, even if it is second-hand.

## ■ What types of drugs are used in asthma treatment?

Every asthma sufferer's needs are a little bit different, and management needs to be personalized. In addition to the non-drug methods mentioned above, asthma medications are certainly the most convenient way of controlling asthma symptoms. They fall into three main groups: relievers, preventers and emergency drugs.

'Relievers' are drugs which act by relaxing the muscular lining of the airways, helping to open up tight breathing tubes. These drugs (like Ventolin) are also known as 'bronchodilators' and are used when the symptoms of asthma are present, rather than on a regular basis.

'Preventers' are used to reduce the underlying inflammation, which causes the symptoms. They must be taken on a regular basis, usually twice a day, to be effective. Most preventive drugs (like Becotide and Flixotide) are inhaled corticosteroids, but there are a couple of other groups of drugs: theophyllines and leukotriene blockers, which are taken in a tablet form.

'Emergency' treatment often consists of large doses of bronchodilating or anti-inflammatory drugs. Some are inhaled via nebuliser and some are injected or taken by mouth.

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## ■ How is asthma managed?

The first step in asthma management is to remove the triggers mentioned earlier.

The second step, in mild asthma, is to use a reliever inhaler when needed to relieve occasional symptoms.

The third step, in moderate asthma, is to use inhaled 'preventer' medication at a low dose, on a daily basis.

The fourth step, in moderately severe asthma, is to use the 'preventer' at a higher dose, also daily.

The fifth step, in severe asthma, is to use nebulised drugs and anti-inflammatory medication taken by mouth.

The best plan is to get educated about asthma. Sign up for an asthma-management plan. Know the drugs you use and when and how they should be used, and learn how to use a peak-flow meter for a more customized treatment.

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## ■ What does one do in case of an asthma attack?

If you are asthmatic and have a 'reliever' medication on hand, use it immediately. If there is no relief, go to the emergency department of the hospital right away for more aggressive treatment.

**Most importantly, LEARN more about asthma, use your medications as prescribed and reduce the 'triggers' in your environment. PARTICIPATE! Your life is worth it!**

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