

All About Asthma

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All About Asthma

Learning about Asthma

If you have just been told that you have asthma, or if you are the parent of a child who has asthma, you probably have a lot of questions. Here are answers to some of the questions that people often ask:

What does Asthma feel like?

If you don't have asthma, you'll never know. But you can get an idea of what asthma feels like by trying this: put one end of a straw in your mouth and curl your lips tight around it. Then totally clamp off your nose with your fingers. Now breathe. Tough isn't it? How about doing this for several hours? Maybe while walking up a flight of stairs? Imagine trying to go to sleep like this. This is what a person experiences when asthma is not controlled by medication.

What happens to the airways when a person has Asthma?

When a person with asthma has an attack, or exacerbation, the airways:

- Become narrowed
- Are inflamed
- Produce too much mucus

These changes make it more difficult to get air in and out of the lungs, causing the asthmatic person to work harder for each breath. Fortunately medication can reverse these changes and help the person breathe more easily.

Airway Inflammation

Inflammation is a major cause of the airway narrowing that makes it hard for people with asthma to breathe. Airway narrowing due to inflammation occurs in several ways:

- Airway Hyperresponsiveness

- The lungs are made up of many tubes that carry air to small chambers, where it passes into the bloodstream. Inflammation causes these tubes to swell, reducing the hollow space inside where the air flows through. Inflammation also causes the airways to become hypersensitive, or to over-react. The tubes of the airways are lined with smooth muscle. When the walls of these tubes are inflamed, airway hyperresponsiveness leads to excessive contractions of the smooth muscles. As the smooth muscles contract, the airway tubes narrow and there is less room for air to pass through. These excessively strong contractions are called bronchospasms.
- Excess Mucus Secretion
 - There are special cells, called goblet (like the wine glass) cells, in the walls of the airways that keep the lungs constantly “oiled” with mucus. Mucus makes it easy to clear debris out of our lungs. However, when inflammation sets in, these cells tend to take their job too seriously, secreting large amounts of mucus into the airways. This excess mucus can plug up the smaller airway tubes.
- Mucosal Edema
 - Water-like fluid tends to collect during airway inflammation. This also causes the airway walls to swell.

What triggers an Asthma Attack?

Certain things can trigger an asthma attack, including:

- Allergies
- Infections
- Irritants in the environment
- Exercise
- Dry, cold air
- Some medications, such as aspirin

5 Star!

Dr Richard Mayse
& all the staff are
exceptional!

— *Janice Raver*

TRAAC Staff

The staff at Texas
Regional Asthma and
Allergy Center are
standing by to help you!
If you have questions,
need to set appointments
or any other service
related items, call today!

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suggestions and hope to
make your experience
the best it can be!

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