

Asthma & Allergies: the Warning Signs of Asthma

Some asthma symptoms may develop days before breathing tests show a significant decrease in lung function. Yet in some situations the symptoms develop suddenly. The most common symptoms of asthma or an attack include:

- Coughing, especially at night or during exercise
- Wheezing or losing your breath easily
- Tightness in the chest
- Runny or stuffy nose, sore throat, and other typical allergy or cold symptoms
- Fatigue and weakness, especially during exercise
- Trouble sleeping

What should you do if you have any of these asthma warning signs? Ideally, you and your doctor should have already worked out an asthma action plan. This is a simple set of steps to follow when you have asthma symptoms. Your asthma action plan may include measuring your breathing capacity with a device called a spirometer and taking a dose of quick relief inhaler medication. Your doctor may also want you to change the dose of your daily maintenance therapy to help control your asthma.

Warning Signs of an Asthma Emergency

Some warning signs of asthma are more serious. They include:

- Symptoms that keep getting worse, even with treatment
- Difficulty catching your breath or talking
- Flaring your nostrils as you breathe
- Sucking in your chest or stomach with each breath
- Difficulty walking
- A bluish or grayish tinge to your lips or fingernails

If you have any of these asthma symptoms, get emergency medical help right away.

Anaphylaxis

Some people who have asthma also have allergies. For example, hay fever is a risk factor for developing asthma. Some triggers can make asthma worse and in some

cases a serious type of allergic reaction called anaphylaxis can occur. Anaphylaxis can be caused by food allergies, latex allergies, or allergies to insect stings. Most allergic reactions are localized to one area of your body. An allergic reaction in your skin leads to hives. An allergic reaction in your nose leads to congestion.

But in anaphylaxis, many different organs of your body are affected at once. The results are rapid and life-threatening. Signs of anaphylaxis are:

- Hives and itchiness
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Pain in the abdomen
- Severe swelling in the throat that makes it hard to swallow or breathe
- Confusion
- Slurred speech
- Fast or weak pulse
- Dizziness (caused by a drop in blood pressure)
- Unconsciousness

Anaphylaxis is a medical emergency. Keep in mind that anaphylaxis often develops quickly after exposure to the allergen -- possibly within minutes. If you know you're at risk for anaphylaxis, your doctor should have prescribed a medicine for emergencies. Always carry the medicine with you.

Knowing Your Own Warning Signs of Asthma

Of course, the list of asthma symptoms above is only a general guide. Everyone's case is different, and you may have other asthma warning signs distinct to you.

So, pay attention to your asthma symptoms. You may notice a pattern that can help guide you. Knowing your personal signs of asthma allows you to take action early, reducing the severity of your asthma attacks -- or preventing asthma attacks altogether.

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