

Asthma: The Basics

WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is a **chronic lung disease** with two main causes: **inflammation** (swelling and excess mucus build-up in the airways) and **airway constriction** (tightening of the muscles surrounding the airways). Treating both causes of the disease is necessary for many patients to achieve optimal asthma control and help prevent symptoms.

Asthma symptoms include:

- shortness of breath
- wheezing
- chest tightness
- cough

Other signs of asthma can include a persistent cough at night; difficulty breathing during, or soon after, physical exertion or exercise; or waking up at night because of one or more of these symptoms.

Asthma is unpredictable. Asthma symptoms may seem mild or even nonexistent, but they can flare up and be severe at anytime. The underlying inflammation of asthma always exists, making preventive treatment important.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF POOR ASTHMA CONTROL?

Uncontrolled asthma can put patients at risk for increased asthma symptoms, sudden attacks, hospitalization and even death.

Signs of poor asthma control include:

- waking at night with asthma symptoms
- emergency room visits, hospitalizations or other urgent care for asthma
- need for quick-relief medications (e.g., albuterol) more than twice a week
- missing school or work because of asthma
- being unable to maintain normal activity levels

In the recent nationwide Asthma USA survey, a large portion of adults and children had uncontrolled asthma based on an Asthma Control Test™ or Childhood Asthma Control Test score of ≤ 19 ;

- 41 percent of adults
- 31 percent of children between the ages of 4 and 11
- 25 percent of children ages 12 to 17

HOW IS ASTHMA TREATED?

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has published a set of treatment guidelines that call for the use of an inhaled corticosteroid (ICS) and a long-acting beta₂-agonist (LABA) as a preferred therapy for patients five years of age and older who are not controlled on ICS alone.

When initiating therapy in patients 12 years of age and older with moderate to severe persistent asthma, the guidelines recommend the combination of a LABA and ICS.

Since asthma is a complex disease that affects different individuals in different ways, it is important for patients to work with their doctor before initiating or changing their treatment regimen. The NIH recommends the ongoing assessment of asthma control with validated questionnaires, such as the Asthma Control Test and the Childhood Asthma Control Test.

The Asthma Control Test is for people 12 years of age and older; the Childhood Asthma Control Test is for children 4-11 years of age.

ASTHMA: BY THE NUMBERS

- **Over 22 million** in the U.S. live with asthma, including more than **6 million children**
- There are more than **12 million office visits** for asthma each year
- Each year, asthma requires **1.8 million emergency room visits**
- **Over 3,500 die each year** as a result of asthma

The Asthma Control Test is a trademark of QualityMetric Incorporated.