

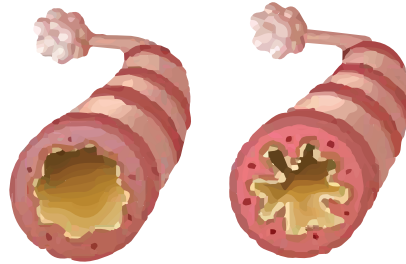
Work-Related Asthma

WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is a disease of the lungs that makes breathing difficult. Some chemicals present in workplace settings can cause or trigger asthma, which is then known as occupational or work-related asthma.

In asthma, the following can occur and cause obstruction to airflow:

- Inflammation and swelling of the air passageways
- Temporary narrowing of the airways
- Cells of the airway produce more mucus



Common symptoms include:

- Shortness of breath
- Coughing
- Wheezing- a whistling or squeaky sound when breathing out
- Chest tightness, pain, or pressure

These symptoms are produced by many diseases, including asthma, and require prompt medical attention.



ASTHMA AND YOUR JOB

Work-related asthma is caused or worsened by breathing in certain chemical fumes, gases, dust, or other harmful substances while on the job.

Substances include many chemicals used in manufacturing; paints, cleaning products; dusts from wood, grain, and flour; latex gloves; certain molds; animals; and insects.

- Chemicals in the air or food
- Animals (pet hair or dander)
- Mold
- Pollen
- Changes in weather

- Dust mites
- Exercise

- Perfumes
- Medications (aspirin and other NSAIDs)
- Respiratory infections, such as the common cold



Cigarette smoking may increase the risk of developing some types of occupational asthma, and makes symptoms control more difficult.

An evaluation by a doctor may include a breathing test and possibly a chest x-ray. The doctor will perform a physical exam and ask about your medical history.

A particular workplace environment or substance may be causing the symptoms to worsen. The doctor may conduct other tests such as an allergy skin prick test to see if there is another possible asthma trigger.



PROTECTING YOURSELF FROM ASTHMA

- Quick-relief (so called "rescue") medications are inhaled medications taken as needed to provide immediate relief from symptoms of an asthma attack, such as cough, wheezing, or trouble breathing.
- Long-term medications are either inhaled or taken daily to prevent symptoms in moderate to severe asthmatics by reducing the swelling or inflammation in the airways.
- Depending on severity of asthma, additional medication may be prescribed by your doctor.
- People with asthma should get an annual flu vaccine and protect themselves from respiratory infections. Other vaccines may also be recommended by your doctor.



The most important difference in the treatment of work-related versus non-work related asthma is the need to eliminate the irritating exposure at the workplace.



Exposure elimination is also key to prevent the development of work-related asthma. Employers should establish programs to prevent occupational asthma by eliminating exposure to allergens and irritants, or substituting them with less toxic products.

Personal respiratory protective equipment might reduce the occurrence of occupational asthma but not completely prevent it. Lifestyle modifications like quitting smoking, eating a balanced diet, and exercising regularly can help prevent and lessen the severity of asthma.



The information is for educational purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health care provider with any questions you have regarding your medical care.



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