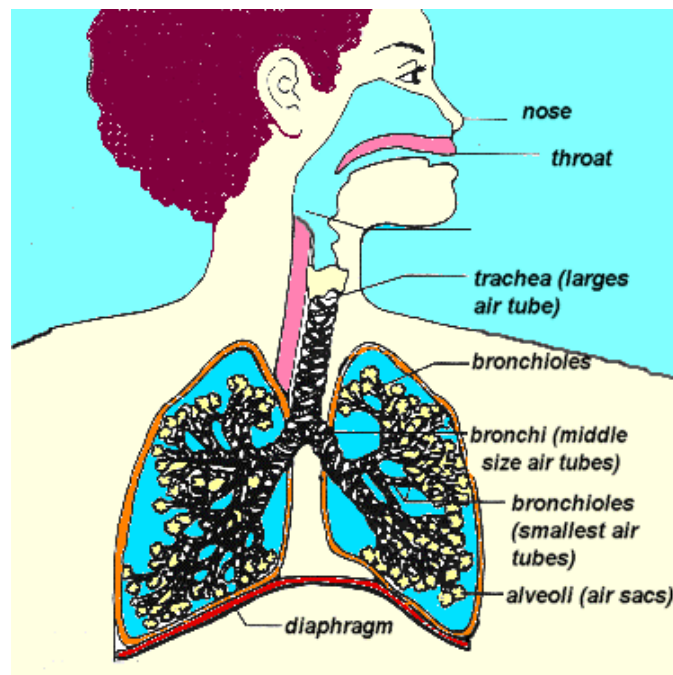


What is Asthma?

Asthma is a chronic disease of the respiratory system, that can be controlled, but not cured. Young children with asthma occasionally will "outgrow" their asthma, but more commonly, asthma continues into the teen and adult years.

Over the last 10-20 years, asthma has been increasing in the United States, and unfortunately, children and adults in New England, are more likely to develop asthma than in other areas of the United States.

The picture below shows the components of the respiratory system.



Asthma has 2 parts: swelling or inflammation, and tightening of the airways. When most of us breathe, the muscles that are wrapped around the airways are very relaxed, and the lining inside the airways is very thin. This lets the airways open up very wide so that it is easy to get air in and out of your lungs.

During an asthma attack, the muscles around the airways tighten, or "spasm" (like when you make a fist) and the lining inside the airways swell, and get clogged with thick mucous. This makes the airways much skinnier than usual so it is harder to move air in and out of the lungs, and it is harder to breathe!

What causes an asthma attack?

There are common "triggers" that cause asthma attacks. These triggers are individual, and can vary from person to person.

Some common triggers include:

getting sick with a cold, breathing in cigarette smoke, cold weather, pollen, pet dander, mold and mildew, and strong odors.

What are some common signs of asthma?

- ◆ Coughing
- ◆ Waking up at night from coughing
- ◆ Trouble breathing during activity and exercise
- ◆ Wheezing
- ◆ Shortness of breath
- ◆ Tight feeling in the chest
- ◆ Rapid and labored breathing

How is asthma treated?

An asthma attack is usually treated with an inhaler, or a nebulizer machine, which delivers a "rescue" medicine. The rescue medicine opens up the airways so it is easier to breathe again. The picture below shows a child using an inhaler.



If you or your child has more severe asthma, they may also be on a "preventive" medicine, which they take every day, to help control their symptoms.

