

## Asthma

### ***Understanding Asthma***

Asthma is a disease that affects your lungs and causes breathing problems. It is the most common long-term disease of children. It causes repeated episodes of wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness, and nighttime or early morning coughing. It is with you all the time, but you may have asthma attacks only when something bothers your lungs.

### ***What are the symptoms of Asthma?***

Asthma symptoms are much like other respiratory problems such as emphysema, bronchitis, and lower respiratory infections. Sometimes the only symptom is a chronic cough, especially at night, or coughing or wheezing that only happens while exercising.

### ***What happens during an Asthma Attack?***

People with asthma have sudden attacks when the airways in their lungs get narrower, and breathing becomes more difficult. Airways are the paths that carry air to the lungs. During an attack, the sides of the airways in your lungs become inflamed and swollen. Muscles around the airways tighten, and less air passes in and out of the lungs. Excess mucus forms in the airways, clogging them even more. The attack, also called an episode, can include coughing, chest tightness, wheezing, and trouble breathing.

### ***Are You at Risk for an Asthma Attack?***

#### **Asthma most commonly occurs in:**

- Children, by the age of five
- Adults in their thirties
- Adults older than 65
- People living in urban communities

#### **Other factors include:**

- Family history of asthma
- Personal medical history of allergies

#### **Children most susceptible to asthma attacks include the following:**

- Children with a family history of asthma
- Infants and other young children who when they develop a respiratory infection, they also tend to have wheezing
- Children who have allergies
- Children who have exposure to tobacco smoke and other allergens prior to birth

## **Asthma Facts**

- Kentucky has the third highest incidence of asthma in the United States.
- In 2001, 20.3 million Americans had asthma, and 12 million had an asthma attack in the previous year.
- If a person has a parent with asthma, he or she is three to six times more likely to develop asthma than someone who does not have a parent with asthma.
- There is no cure for asthma, but with proper management, most people can lead healthy lives.
- Asthma is one of the most common diseases to complicate a pregnancy.

## **Diagnosing Asthma**

Asthma can be difficult to diagnose, especially in children under five years old. Regular physical exams that include checks of lung function and for allergies can help make the right diagnosis. To diagnose asthma doctors will ask you questions about coughing and whether breathing problems occur during exercise. Doctors will also ask you about symptoms such as chest tightness, wheezing, and colds that last for more than 10 days. Doctors will do tests, which may include spirometry – a test that measures how much air and how fast you can blow air out of your lungs after taking a deep breath.

## **Managing and Treating Asthma**

It is important to work with your physician to develop a specific treatment plan for managing your asthma. With the proper medications and treatment plan, asthma can be controlled. To manage your asthma be sure to identify and minimize contact with asthma triggers. Your physician can help you identify triggers and let you know what to do when an asthma attack occurs.

## **Resources**

### **UK HealthCare**

(859) 257-1000

[www.ukhealthcare.uky.edu](http://www.ukhealthcare.uky.edu)

Our Asthma, Allergy and Sinus Clinic can help you with your asthma or learn more by visiting our web site.

### **American Lung Association**

(800) 586-4872

[www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org)

Provides education about the prevention and management of asthma.

### **National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute**

Division of Lung Diseases

6701 Rockledge Drive, MSC 7952

Suite 10018

Bethesda, MD 20892-7952

[www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

Provides useful information and resources for asthma sufferers.

**UK HealthCare** is UK Hospital, Kentucky Children's Hospital, Kentucky Clinics, Markey Cancer Center, Gill Heart Institute, Kentucky Neuroscience & Orthopaedics Institute, and the clinical activities of the UK Colleges of Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Health Sciences, Public Health and Nursing.

