

## Asthma

Asthma makes the airways in the lungs swell and close up. It is hard to breathe. People with HIV may have asthma their doctors do not detect. Tobacco smoke makes asthma worse. You may be more likely to get an illness in the lungs such as emphysema.

### Signs

Common asthma signs are:

- Frequent cough, especially at night
- Losing your breath easily or shortness of breath
- Feeling very tired or weak when exercising
- Wheezing or coughing after exercise
- Feeling tired, easily upset, grouchy, or moody
- Decreases or changes in lung function as measured on a peak flow meter
- Signs of a cold or allergies (sneezing, runny nose, cough, nasal congestion, sore throat, and headache)

Trouble sleeping

### How to Know You Have Asthma

The signs of asthma can be like those of other lung diseases and heart failure. A doctor will ask about the symptoms and do an exam. Your doctor may also ask about other family members and whether they have allergies or lung problems. He or she may also do tests such as:

- Blood Tests
- Allergy tests

- Chest X-ray. This will show whether there is air trapped in the chest.
- Exercise test on a treadmill or a bike. People with asthma may have problems with their breath when they are active.
- Sputum (saliva) test. With asthma, the sputum may be sticky, spongy and whitish. If there is an infection, the sputum may be yellow.
- Lung function tests. These check to see how blocked the airways are. They also check how the lungs react to triggers.
- Measure the amount of air that enters and leaves the lungs. People who have asthma often take in more or less air than they breathe out.

### Treatment

There is no cure for asthma. Treatment works to control symptoms and make the lungs work as well they can.

Whether a person with asthma has HIV or not, the treatment is the same.

There are many types of medicine that can help. Most meds have no side effects when used with anti-HIV meds.

A spray you inhale can help open the airways when you have an asthma attack. In more severe cases, a person may need to go to the ER.

The more a person knows about asthma, the better. When you know what starts an attack, how to keep an attack under control and when to take the correct drug, you can better manage your asthma.

## Asthma Attacks

Asthma may be worse at some times more than others. Signs of an attack are:

- Coughing, especially at night
- Dry cough
- Wheezing
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness, pain, or pressure

In a severe attack, the heart and lungs race to get oxygen to the cells. When these attacks happen, a person may not be able to speak, may prefer to sit upright or lean forward and may become confused or tired. If the wheeze seems to go away, it could be a sign that the attack has gotten worse. This could lead to death if they do not get enough air.

## How to Prevent an Attack

Avoid things that may trigger an attack. These may cause an attack:

- Dust
- Animal dander, molds, pollens and cockroaches.
- Foods with sulfites, such as red wine, beer or shrimp
- Exercise
- Fumes from cleaner, perfumes, or exhaust
- When you cry, scream or laugh

These may affect people with HIV more than others.

It may help to cover your mattress and box springs with a zippered case. Remove carpets and control the heat and humidity to prevent attacks.

A person with asthma should not smoke. The smoke bothers the airways and causes damage to the lungs. It also takes oxygen out of the bloodstream.

### **For more information**

Contact your Registered Nurse Care Manager, or call Positive Healthcare's Nurse Advice Line at: (800) 797-1717.

