

ADVANTAGE

Asthma

If you have any concerns about whether your plan covers the subject matter discussed in Advantage, please contact your NMG Benefits Healthcare Advisor.

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What is asthma?



A common chronic condition that affects the airways. It tends to be diagnosed in childhood, although diagnosis in adulthood can occur too

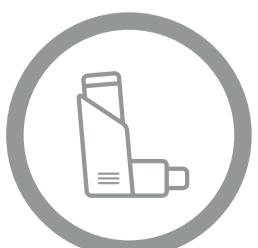
Symptoms of an asthma attack

- 1 Wheezing (a whistling sound) when breathing
- 2 Coughing
- 3 Tight chest
- 4 Difficulty breathing

What triggers asthma attacks?



How is asthma treated?



With a quick-acting medicine (a reliever) as well as long-acting medication (controller).



Questions

for Dr Thapelo Motshudi

1 What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic condition that affects the airways. It is a common illness that is often diagnosed in children, although in some people it is discovered in adulthood. It is considered a chronic illness even though one does not always experience attacks. This means that the likelihood of getting an asthma attack will always be there.

2 How do you know you have asthma?

Narrowing of the airways, also understood as spasms, defines an asthma attack. When this happens, breathing becomes very difficult. This can be triggered by a number of different things such as dust, pollen, exercise, chest infections, pets, grass, etc. Asthma sufferers vary in that they each have different triggers for their attacks. During an attack there is wheezing (a whistling sound) when breathing, coughing, a tight chest and difficulty in breathing. Most asthma sufferers express this feeling as "a tight band around the chest". Asthma is usually hereditary; therefore knowing your family history is very useful.

3 How is it diagnosed?

Should you experience any of the above symptoms, your doctor will ask you questions related to your daily activities and family history. During examination, they may be able to pick up some wheezing. Then you will likely be asked to perform a lung function exercise. This means blowing as hard as you can and for as long as you can into a small hand-held machine called a peak flow meter, which measures your lungs ability to blow out air and their strength in sustaining it.

Your doctor may even give you an inhaler to inhale some medication and ask you to repeat the peak flow exercise. In some instances you may require a chest x-ray or some allergy tests. Hospitalisation is often only required if your breathing is severe and requires urgent management.

4 How is asthma treated?

Not everyone with asthma takes the same medication. However, you should receive quick-acting medicine (a reliever) as well as long-acting medication (a controller). The reliever should always be close-by in the event you experience an attack. It acts to give you immediate relief from shortness of breath and spasms of the airways. The long-acting medication is taken routinely (daily) and acts to prevent attacks.

Should you find that you use your reliever frequently, you need to go back to your doctor to adjust or change your medication. Asthma sufferers' symptoms can be mild (3-4 times a month or less), moderate (night time symptoms weekly) or severe (daily). Each category responds better to a certain combination of drugs, which your doctor would recommend for you.

In the event you have managed to be symptom-free for over 6 months to a year, your doctor may suggest that you trial a medication-free period or reduce your doses over time until you are ready to go without any medication. This often occurs if you know your triggers and are able to avoid them. This however, does not mean you no longer have asthma.