

Asthma: When to Call a Doctor

Overview

When you or your child has asthma, it is important to know the symptoms of difficulty breathing. It can help you make quick decisions about medicine and other treatment.

Follow your asthma action plan to know how to prevent an asthma attack or make it less severe.

Mild difficulty breathing

You are having mild difficulty breathing if:

- Your breathing is slightly faster than normal.
- Your skin color is normal.

If you have mild difficulty breathing, you may need to take medicine.

Moderate difficulty breathing

Call a doctor if you have symptoms of moderate difficulty breathing:

- You obviously breathe faster than normal.
- You tire quickly during talking or eating. You may have to catch your breath during eating.
- You use your belly muscles to help you breathe. You may see your belly moving in instead of out when you breathe in.
- Your skin—especially on your face, hands, and feet—is pale to slightly gray or has a lace-like purple and pale pattern (mottled). But your tongue, gums, and lips remain pink.

Severe difficulty breathing

Call 911 right away if you have symptoms of



severe difficulty breathing:

- You breathe very fast. Breathing is so difficult, it is hard to talk. A child usually grunts with each breath.
- You use your neck, chest, and belly muscles to breathe. The skin between your ribs pulls in with each breath. You also may open your nostrils wide when you breathe in.
- You feel anxious and cannot eat because it is too hard to breathe.
- You take longer than usual to breathe out and sometimes make a high-pitched, musical sound when you breathe in.
- You sit up, lean forward, or sit with your nose tilted up as if sniffing the air.
- Your skin stays pale, gray, bluish, or mottled. This may be seen on the tongue, lips, earlobes, and nail beds.



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