

# Asthma: Getting the facts right

**Myth:** Asthma is a disease people are born with. If I didn't have asthma as a child, I can't get asthma now.

**Fact:** Asthma can develop at any age. Asthma is a noncontagious disease of the bronchial tubes of the lungs. An asthmatic person has hyperreactive bronchial tubes; their lungs react abnormally to stimuli that do not adversely affect other people.

**Myth:** Asthma is triggered by stress. Asthma is an emotional disorder.

**Fact:** Researchers do not know the exact cause of the disease, but there are several common elements that provoke asthma attacks. Some common triggers are pollen, mold, animal dander, house dust, some foods, viral infections (including colds),

cigarette smoke, chalk dust, strong chemical smells, and air pollution. An asthma attack can be a stressful experience for a patient, but stress by itself does not cause an attack.

**Myth:** Asthmatics should not exercise.

**Fact:** Good asthma management includes exercise and healthy habits. Moderate exercise is beneficial except in those sports which require constant running. Other sports are encouraged, especially swimming and golf. Many Olympic athletes have proven they can successfully compete in sports, despite asthma. An asthmatic should consult a physician before beginning an exercise program.

**Myth:** Asthma isn't really a serious disease. Not many people

have asthma.

**Fact:** Approximately 10 million Americans have asthma (about 4 percent). Each year, more than 4,000 people die from asthma. However, with proper management, a person with asthma can live a normal lifestyle.

**Myth:** The only symptom of an asthma attack is wheezing.

**Fact:** There are several symptoms of asthma. Adult-onset asthma may be recognized in someone who has a chronic cough, shortness of breath upon minor exertion (climbing stairs, etc.), breathing problems at night, recurring bronchitis, or other lung infections. If you have a persistent breathing problem, consult a physician.

## Do's and don'ts for allergy sufferers

Allergy sufferers can help alleviate their symptoms by following a few do's and don'ts:

### DO'S

**DO** keep windows closed at night; use air conditioning which cleans, cools, and dries the air.

**DO** minimize early morning activity, when pollen counts are usually highest (between 5 a.m. and 10 a.m.).

**DO** keep car windows closed if you drive to work or school.

**DO** stay indoors when the pollen count or humidity is high and on windy days when dust and pollen blow through the air.

**DO** avoid areas where ragweed grows.

### DON'TS

**DON'T** mow the lawn or be around freshly cut grass-

mowing stirs up pollens. **DON'T** hang sheets or clothing outdoors to dry; pollen may collect on them.

**DON'T** ignore your symptoms. If they persist, see an allergist, a specialist trained in the diagnosis and treatment of asthma and the allergic diseases.

For more information about allergies, or a referral to an allergist in your area, call the toll free Physicians' Referral and Information Line at 1-800-822-ASMA (2762).

The Physicians' Referral and Information Line is a public service of the American Academy of Allergy and Immunology, the largest national medical specialty organization for allergists and immunologists, with more than 4,000 members worldwide.

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