

La Pine Community Clinic
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ASHTMA DO I HAVE IT?

How many of you have told a friend that they should have their cough examined by a Doctor/Medical Provider because they may have asthma? I'm confident that few of you have. In fact, I suspect that most of you are familiar with the typical presentation of tight chest, hard to breath, wheezing kid as the asthmatic. Most of us have seen it at least once and unfortunately, too many have been on the experience end of it.

Asthma does not always present the same. In-other-words, we all need to consider that another person's symptoms may not be synonymous with your past experience. Often times, I hear that a friend or family member attributed their experience with that of the current patient and has confirmed or dismissed the possibility of asthma. Unfortunately, this well-intentioned advice may be erroneous.

Asthma, by definition, is an expiratory/restrictive airway disease. This means that the problem is not getting air into the lungs, but rather, getting it out. Restrictive airway diseases include COPD, asthma and other reactive airway disease. Within these disease states, peoples' airway tubes (bronchioles) are constricted (narrowed) which makes air- flow difficult. Imagine breathing through a straw for longer than 10-20 seconds. You'd be exhausted. Essentially, asthmatics have a disease that causes shortness of breath, chest tightness and in some severe cases loss of consciousness or death. Different triggers may cause this asthmatic response. Common ones, for example, may be cold air, dust, perfumes, smoke etc. Most moderate to severe asthmatics do much better once they have established what their triggers are. This can sometimes be easily accomplished with a journal or perhaps allergy testing. Regardless of the cause, the treatment for an acute attack of asthma is fairly standard. Knowing what degree of asthma you have will help you to better treat your condition.

An important thing to learn, from this article, is that the response to bronchconstriction may vary greatly. You may develop a cough, chest pain, fatigue or even "pass out." If you or someone you know has trouble exercising or with a change in climate, you/they may want to consider an evaluation for asthma or a variation of it.

Additionally, young athletes often compete with untreated exercise induced asthma because the symptoms are not recognized. This may also be

difficult to diagnose in a clinical setting where the adolescent's trigger (with exertion) cannot always be recreated. In this case, history is important. Make sure your provider listens to the patient's symptoms carefully. This will increase the likelihood of a correct diagnosis. In closing, if you suspect you may have a respiratory issue, consider a consult. Tests such as spirometry or peak flow may aid in identifying this or another lung disease. We can teach you how to manage your lung disease which will most likely increase your quality of life. Please join me next time for my article, "Low Back Pain the number one medical cause for missed work."