

## Asthma - Diagnosis, Treatment and Prevention

How is asthma diagnosed? Asthma is a clinical diagnosis, which means the clinician knows that you have asthma by listening to the description of your symptoms (history) and by doing a thorough chest examination. Sometimes, additional tests may be required if the diagnosis is in doubt. A peak flow meter or a spirometry may be necessary if the diagnosis is uncertain. How is asthma treated? In the majority of asthma sufferers, symptoms can usually be prevented with treatment. Therefore you are able to get on with a normal life. Most asthma sufferers are treated with inhalers. Inhalers are devices designed to deliver small doses of medications into the airways directly, thereby keeping the systemic side-effects of the medications to the minimal possible. There are many types of inhalers on the market these days. However, they can be classified as 'relievers', 'preventers' and 'long acting bronchodilators'.  
**Reliever.** Reliever is taken 'as required' to ease symptoms. The effect of the medicine is more or less immediate. Reliever causes the muscle of the airways to relax, allowing air to get in and out of the lungs easily. As a result of that, symptoms of asthma resolve. Relievers are also called bronchodilators. The medicine commonly used in reliever is called salbutamol.  
**Preventer.** Preventer requires a longer time than reliever to work. Once kicked in, preventer holds the airways open for a long time, Unlike reliever where it only causes the constricted airways to relax for a short period of time. The medicine commonly used in preventer is a steroid.  
**Long-term bronchodilator.** Long-term bronchodilator may be added if symptoms are not under control by reliever and preventer. Long-term bronchodilator works up to 12 hours after each dose is taken. The medicine commonly used in long-term bronchodilator is called salmeterol. Rarely, tablets are used to treat an asthmatic attack. This is true for resistant asthma, where inhalers have little or no effect on the symptoms. The commonest tablet used for asthma treatment is steroid tablet. A short-course of steroid tablets is often necessary to treat severe resistant asthma. Some people are hesitant to take steroids because of its known obnoxious effects. However, if steroid is used appropriately and only for short period of time, side-effects are not an issue and virtually unknown of. If steroids are used on a long-term basis, side-effects like diabetes, weight gain, thin skin, etc., are inevitable. How much inhaler should I use? Different people respond differently to medicine. This is also true for inhalers. As a general rule, the appropriate dose of an inhaler is the lowest dose that gives symptom relief. A doctor may prescribe a higher dose initially to "get things under control". When symptoms subside, the dose may then be reduced to the lowest possible that is enough to keep symptoms away. What are the lifestyle changes that may be necessary to reduce symptoms of asthma? There are triggers that can bring up an asthmatic attack. If you are a smoker, quitting smoking may benefit you tremendously. Different people may have different triggers, so try to identify what's yours and it is wise to try to avoid them. Can asthma be cured? In short, no, asthma cannot be cured. However, it is treatable. If you have asthma, it sticks with you for the rest of your life. Having said that, some children who suffer asthma in childhood 'grow out of it' when by the time they are adults.

## About the Author

Promotes and integrates scientific research, education, and practical applications of sports medicine and exercise science to maintain and enhance.

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