

# Asthma

and

# FAMILY HEALTH HISTORY



## What is a family health history?

A family health history is a portrait of the shared lives and health of your extended family.

## Screening recommendations

### ... for individuals WITH A FAMILY HISTORY of asthma

 Family history is a risk factor for asthma but there are no specific screening guidelines for individuals with a family history of asthma.

 Consult your health care provider if you have any of the symptoms listed for those with no known history of asthma.

### ... for individuals WITH NO KNOWN FAMILY HISTORY of asthma

 See your health care provider if you have any of the following symptoms:

- You cough a lot – especially if you cough at night
- You sometimes cannot catch your breath or you breathe too fast
- You can hear a whistling sound (wheezing) when you breathe in or out
- Your chest sometimes feels tight or hurts
- You feel unusually tired or weak

 When you see your health care provider:

- Your provider should ask you about your medical history, do a physical exam, and order a lung function test called “spirometry” or other lung testing.



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# Asthma risk factors and what you can do about them

## Things you can change

- **Obesity:** Research is showing that obesity may be a risk factor for asthma
- **Stress:** Strong emotional reactions such as anxiety or stress can trigger an asthma episode
- **Work exposures:** 15 percent of asthma in adults is caused or made worse by workplace exposures
- **Home exposures:** Asthma can be caused or triggered by exposure to allergens or irritants in the home

## Things you can't change

- **Family history:** If you have a parent with asthma, you are 3-6 times more likely to develop asthma than someone who does not have a parent with asthma
- **Sex:** In early life, the prevalence of asthma is higher in boys. At puberty, the sex ratio shifts, and asthma becomes more prevalent in women.
- **Race and ethnicity:** African-Americans and American Indians are more likely to have asthma than Hispanics, Whites and Asians in the U.S.
- **Allergies:** Asthma triggered by allergies affects more than 50 percent of the 20 million people who have asthma

## What can you do if you have a family history of asthma?

- If you are obese or overweight, set a realistic weight loss goal and work toward it
- Steps you can take inside your home to reduce exposure to allergens and triggers:
  - Reduce dust mite exposure by washing sheets in hot water and use mite proof mattress and pillow covers
  - Reduce your exposure to pests such as cockroaches and mice by storing food in sealed containers and keeping counter tops and floors clean of grease and crumbs
  - Reduce mold exposure by repairing plumbing and roof leaks and remove mold with soap and water. Avoid using humidifiers or vaporizers; if one is used, change the water every day and clean the inside of the appliance weekly.
  - Reduce exposure to secondhand smoke. Don't allow others to smoke in your home. If you smoke, quit.
  - Reduce exposure to pet allergens by finding another home for your pet, or don't allow it in your bedroom
- Recognize what causes stress in your life and learn how to reduce that stress
- Talk to your health care provider about your family health history of asthma
- See a health care provider if you have asthma symptoms
- See your health care provider if your asthma is affected by your job
- Work with your health care provider to make an individualized asthma action plan
- Re-visit your health care provider at least yearly and if asthma symptoms appear



## Sources

- Minnesota Department of Health Asthma Program, [www.health.state.mn.us/asthma](http://www.health.state.mn.us/asthma)
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