**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.
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
- American Lung Association, www.lungusa.org
- American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology, www.aaaai.org
- Mayo Clinic, www.mayoclinic.com

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