

Tobacco and Asthma

What Is Asthma?

Asthma is a chronic disease of the lungs characterized by constant inflammation and narrowing of the airways (bronchial tubes). Because the airways are swollen and sensitive, they can react strongly to irritants and allergens in the air. When the airways react to airborne irritants, the muscles around them tighten, causing further narrowing. Less air flows into the lungs. The airways often react to this decreased air flow by producing more mucus than normal. The muscle tightening, swelling of the airways, and production of thick mucus all contribute to severely limiting the flow of air into the lungs. As a result, asthma sufferers have bouts of wheezing, chest tightness, shortness of breath, and coughing.

Sometimes symptoms are mild and go away on their own or after minimal treatment with an asthma medicine. At other times, symptoms continue to get worse. When symptoms get more intense and/or additional symptoms appear, this is an asthma attack. Severe asthma attacks may require emergency treatment and can even be fatal.

The disease affects all age groups. In the United States, about 22 million people are known to have asthma (six million of these are children). It is a serious disease with no known cure. However, with proper treatment, diet, and good air quality, most asthmatics experience few interruptions in daily living.

What Is the Link Between Asthma and Tobacco Use?

Asthma usually begins in childhood. Over half of all cases of asthma occur in children who are living in environments where adults smoke. Studies also indicate that children born of mothers who smoked during pregnancy are at high risk for developing asthma. The two major links between tobacco use and asthma are secondhand smoke and smoking during pregnancy. Both create serious health risks for babies and children who have no choice in whether or not they are exposed to tobacco smoke.

Also of note, babies who are exposed to secondhand smoke are more likely to develop allergies, and allergies to cat dander in particular. In fact, the risk for both allergies and asthma developing before age four is double for these babies. The allergy to cat dander is considered problematic because it is a commonly encountered allergen even in environments where cats do not actually reside. Constant exposure to allergens can hasten the development and severity of asthma. If children who develop asthma continue to breathe in secondhand tobacco smoke and/or cat dander, their asthma attacks will be more frequent, more severe, and less manageable. The overall progression of the disease (remember, there is no cure) can speed up.

How Can I Protect My Children?

- Your best option is to quit smoking if you are a smoker. Most states have smoking cessation programs. In South Dakota, the program is the free South Dakota QuitLine. The toll free number is 1-866-SD QUILTS (1-866-737-8487). The South Dakota QuitLine can help with information, coaching, discounts on nicotine withdrawal products, and free professional advice.
- Make your home and car smoke-free areas where no one can smoke.



Tobacco and Asthma, cont.

How Can I Protect My Children?, cont.

- Make sure no one smokes around your children in other homes where they might visit.
- Choose daycare facilities where smoking is not allowed.
- Choose smoke-free restaurants and hotels.
- Teach your children and all family members how secondhand smoke affects their health and the health of others.
- Teach all family members to avoid smoke-filled areas.
Remember that in South Dakota, many restaurants, hotels, and recreational facilities allow smoking.
- Take the Smoke-Free Home Pledge. To do this, call the EPA's toll free Smoke-Free Home Pledge Hotline at 1-866-766-5337. A Smoke-Free Home Kit will be mailed to you. The kit has tips on keeping your home smoke-free, a smoke-free home magnet, and a smoke-free home certificate.



For more information on tobacco and asthma, please visit:
<http://www.tobacco.org/news/269095.html>
<http://ezinearticles.com/?Facts-About-Tobacco-and-Asthma&id=1515148>
<http://www.getastmahelp.org/tobacco.asp>