




**Bayside Medical Group, Inc.**

www.baysidemed.com

## Understanding Asthma

If you have asthma or your child has recently been diagnosed with asthma, then you're not alone. Ten to fifteen million people in the U.S. have asthma, four to five million of them are children. Unfortunately these numbers are on the increase. Asthma can be mild or severe, it can occur seasonally or year round. Some asthma only occurs with exercise. Asthma is frequently hereditary. Although it is believed that asthma never goes away, many people stop having symptoms in the later teen years.

### What Happens During an Attack?



Asthma is a condition which affects the small airways of the lungs called bronchioles. (Think of the bronchioles as very small straws.) When you come in contact with certain “triggers” such as exercise or viral illnesses, or things that you may be allergic to such as smoke, pets, pollen, or dust, these bronchioles become irritated or “twitchy.” The muscles around the bronchiole tubes squeeze them making them more narrow. At the same time, the bronchiole is swelling and accumulating mucus. This adds to the narrowing. Think of the straw again, how easy it is to breathe through it. Now squeeze the straw and try to breathe through it; you can see it takes a lot more effort. Another example is to make a loose fist, hold it to your mouth and

breathe. Air flows easily through your hand. Now try the same thing but make a tight fist.

Remember there are three main processes that take place when you or your child has an asthma attack. In asthma the narrowing of the bronchiole is called bronchoconstriction. The other two things that occur are mucus production and inflammation. This is important to remember because the medications used to treat asthma are bronchodilators to stop the bronchoconstriction, and/or steroidal and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs to stop the inflammation and mucus production.

### What You Can Do

- With the help of your doctor or nurse practitioner, you can identify and try to avoid asthma triggers so you can prevent asthma flare-ups. (See attached handout on “Avoiding or reducing exposure to triggers.”)
- Understand what your medications are used for and when to use them.
- Understand how to use the equipment for treating asthma.
- Get a flu shot every year.
- Don't hesitate to ask questions.
- Remember the goal of asthma management: To have you lead a normal, active life. Your participation in this management is crucial. We are here to help you.