

Asthma



March is the first month of spring. This means the temperature is rising, and soon the bitter cold of winter will disappear and many will enjoy going outside again. March is also a month that was named after Mars the god of war in ancient Rome. Now is a great time to take a look around at what things may be declaring war on your children. Asthma is a medical condition that makes it hard to breath. It can be treated but currently there are no cures for this condition.

Asthma can run in families, allergies to things like dust mites, cockroaches, and animal dander. When a child is experiencing an asthma attack the airways are inflamed and become narrow. The amount of mucus increases in the throat, and the muscles around the chest and throat tighten.

How do I know if my child has asthma? Just like any other condition there are some signs and symptoms that you can look for, wheezing, coughing, tightness in the chest, trouble sleeping, tiring quickly during exercise, and shortness of breath. When they are having a shortness of breath their breathing is shallow and they are having a hard time getting the air to move in and out properly. Keep in mind that having only a few of these symptoms do not necessarily mean that your child has asthma, but the more symptoms the more likely it is that they do have asthma.

If you feel that your child really does have asthma now is the time to see a doctor. They will be able to diagnose asthma through a medical history, physical examination, laboratory tests and a spirometry device is used. If the term spirometry sounds a little frightening not to worry, it is painless. The patient just places their mouth over a tube and the amount of air moving in and out is measured.

Once asthma is diagnosed you can develop an action plan for your child. First make a list of everyone who takes care of your child while away from you, this list could include grandparents, teachers, friend's parents, etc. The next thing you need to do is to figure what triggers your child's asthma. It could be the house pet (cat or dog), it could be dust, during the spring time allergies are running high this could also be a trigger, cigarette smoke, and the list goes on and on. By finding what causes an asthma attack you and your child can take steps to avoid these triggers. Next write down the actions needed to treat an asthma attack. Your doctor will have information on what medication needs to be given. Other things that need to be included on the asthma action plan are the child's name, Doctor's name, Doctor's phone, Hospital/Emergency phone, medications the child is taking, your name and phone number also.

Even with careful planning and avoidance of known triggers your child may still experience an asthma attack. The first thing you should do is to give the prescribed asthma medication at the first sign of an attack. The second thing to do is to try and keep the child calm, if they are stressed it may cause the symptoms to get worse. Third if they are able to drink give them some clear liquids to help break up the mucus in the throat.

Below is a list of ways to improve your home environment:

- √ Eliminate cigarette smoke and other triggers from home
- √ Clean your home and wash bedding regularly (every other week at least)
- √ Use air conditioning or keep windows closed during pollen season
- √ Add dustproof covers to bedding and upholstery