



Student Health Center UNC Wilmington

INSTRUCTION SHEET: ASTHMA

The Student Health Provider has treated you for an asthma attack. An asthma attack is caused by bronchospasm: The bronchi (breathing tubes to the lungs) are constricted to a smaller size. The lining of the bronchi becomes inflamed, and mucus secretion is increased. Due to bronchospasm and mucus buildup, more effort is needed to breathe air in, and even more to breathe air out. Wheezing, coughing, and shortness of breath ensue.

Many factors can bring on an asthma attack. Respiratory infections, either viral or bacterial, are the most common cause. Allergies are also a frequent cause; stress, cigarette smoke or air pollution can also contribute.

Medications used to treat asthma are designed to open up the bronchi. Medicine can be given by inhalation (breathed into the lungs), mouth, shot, or intravenously (into the veins). Medicine given by inhalation is generally the safest and most effective.

MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR ASTHMA ATTACK:

- 1- Rest at home. Stay relaxed and avoid emotional upset.
- 2- Drink extra liquids. Fluids keep mucus in your bronchi loose and easier to cough up.
- 3- Use the prescribed medicine as directed; too little or too much medicine can worsen your condition.
- 4- Avoid irritating substances such as smoke, pollen, and dust.
- 5- If you smoke, STOP. No if, ands, or buts — smoking is especially dangerous if you have asthma! If other people are smoking around you, ask them to stop.
- 6- Return to the Student Health Center or schedule a follow-up appointment with your personal/referral doctor within a few days. Tell the doctor's office that you need a "work-in" appointment. Your doctor can work with you to treat this attack and prevent future attacks.
- 7- If your condition worsens, go promptly to the nearest emergency department for further treatment.