

# Help for parents of children with asthma

I have suffered with asthma for most of my life and know all too vividly the horrible sensation of not knowing if I will be able to take another breath. As a child with asthma, the feeling was particularly awful, especially when acute episodes or attacks of asthma would make me feel as if I were suffocating.

And when adults around me would smoke cigarettes, cigars or pipes, or when I was exposed to things I was allergic to (including dogs or cats), I had an especially awful dilemma: reconciling what I'd been taught about respecting adults with knowing that some of their habits could trigger in me another life-threatening attack.

Today there have been many advances in treating asthma and increased awareness of the childhood health and lifestyle problems it poses. There is also much more information available about the triggers of asthma and how parents and school personnel can create healthful environments for all children.

According to the American Lung Association ([www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org)) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, asthma "is the most common chronic disorder in childhood, currently affecting an estimated 6.8 million children under 18 years of age, of which 4.1 million suffered from an asthma attack or episode in 2006."

One of the misconceptions about asthma that can lead to serious consequences is not knowing what the asthma process is.

The ALA defines asthma as "a chronic inflammation of the airways with reversible episodes of obstruction, caused by an increased reaction of the airways to various stimuli. Asthma breathing problems usually happen in 'episodes,' or attacks, but the inflammation underlying asthma is continuous."

This means there might be an absence of acute distress, but the inflammation remains and the child is still at risk.

Asthma can lead to death if it is not managed properly. Breathing provides the body

and its organs with oxygen and cleanses them of waste. If breathing is impaired, this and other organ functions are also compromised.

Asthma triggers vary from person to person. Some triggers the ALA lists are: colds and respiratory infections, allergic reactions, cigarette smoke, excitement and/or stress and exercise.

Qualified allergists and immunologists can help discern what a child's or adult's particular triggers are and help each avoid them. Parents can teach children about respecting and protecting their bodies and polite ways to disengage from potentially harmful situations.

As early as possible, children should be taught about their asthma and have ample knowledge of what to do in case of an attack. Parents also should ensure that adults at any venue where the child will spend time, such as school, know that the child has asthma and what to do if an attack should occur.

The American Academy of Pediatrics ([www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)) has an excellent area on its Web site devoted to childhood asthma, along with guidelines for working with schools and other useful tools for parents.

The American Lung Association's Web site also has valuable information for children, parents and other adults who suffer from asthma. They also staff a question hotline - 800-548-8252 - with medical professionals.

Of course, setting an excellent example for children at home is the first way parents can show the importance of protecting the lungs: abstaining from (or quitting) smoking, keeping a clean environment and observing air-quality issues outdoors.

Teaching children about God's protective love and the ways they can pray and relax during an attack can also help them better cope with the physical and emotional terror of asthma.

E-mail [maurpratt@aol.com](mailto:maurpratt@aol.com). Web site: [www.maureenpratt.com](http://www.maureenpratt.com).