

***NORTH PROVIDENCE PRIMARY CARE ASSOC. INC.
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***Chronic Cough, Wheezing...
Could Be Asthma***

Asthma affects 10 percent of children and 5 percent of adults. The disease is characterized as an increased irritability of the airways, which can lead to inflammation, and narrowing of the airway system. Symptoms of asthma include shortness of breath with worsening on exertion, wheezing (a musical noise heard with breathing), increased breathing rate along with a strained pattern of breathing, fatigue, and chronic cough.

There are many forms of asthma. Asthma can occur in association with an upper respiratory infection; such as sinusitis or bronchitis. Asthma can also result from allergen exposure resulting in allergic asthma. Other forms of asthma can result in response to exercise. Exercise induced asthma usually occurs in adolescents resulting in shortness of breath and wheezing beginning a few minutes into the exercise activity and lasting 30 minutes after the exercise activity is complete.

Diagnosis of asthma can be made by simple testing in your primary care's office with a pulmonary function test (PFTs). This device measures the flow of exhaled air and can determine if there is any restriction to flow. In certain situations, a provocation test may be necessary prior to measuring PFTs, which requires inhalation of a medication called methacholine and this can produce asthma symptoms in asthmatics only.

The mainstay treatment of asthma includes inhalers, which dilate the airways and allow air to flow more easily. Steroids may also be used in acute attacks. A new form of therapy called leukotriene inhibitors medication, which include singulair and acolate are now being used in conjunction with inhalers to stabilize an asthmatic from having an attack by decreasing the activity of the airways. Removing the offending cause such as allergy-proofing your home with mattress covers, picking up old carpet, eliminating the use of feather pillows and dust collectors, removing potted plants, and frequent dusting can limit the number of allergy induced asthma attacks. Patients can also take an active role in treatment, by measuring their peak flows; an inexpensive device which can be hand carried and measures a person's air movement, which can warn a patient of an impending asthma attack.

Today there are many opinions and treatment plans available so that asthma patients can have a full and functional life.

