



Asthma and Family Health History



What is Asthma?

Asthma is a lifelong, or chronic, breathing problem caused by swelling of the airways in the lungs. It can't be cured but it can be prevented and controlled. When you have asthma your airways are sensitive and may react to many things called "triggers". People who have asthma may wheeze, cough or complain of a "tight" feeling in their chest. Asthma is a serious disease, and can lead to death if not treated properly.

Why is Family History Important?

Asthma tends to run in families. Family history is one factor that is often overlooked. Asthma is caused by many different genes that you inherit from your parents, interacting with the environment. Other important risk factors include allergies, respiratory infections, and exposure to secondhand smoke.

Studies show:

- Over half of children who are diagnosed with asthma have a family history of asthma
- A person's risk of developing asthma is higher if he/she has a parent and a sibling with asthma.

What Can You Do?

KNOW your family history. Talk to your relatives and find out if anyone has or has had asthma. Even though you can't change your family history, there are steps you can take that may prevent the disease or reduce its severity.

If you have a family history of asthma:

- Tell your health care provider if you have allergies or trouble breathing
- Protect your lungs—be tobacco free and reduce exposure to secondhand smoke
- Watch for warning signs in you children (such as wheezing or complaints of tightness in their chest)
- Be aware of common asthma triggers
 - ◇ Chemicals
 - ◇ Cockroaches and other insect pests
 - ◇ Pollen and mold
 - ◇ Weather
 - ◇ Pets and other animals
 - ◇ Exercising too hard (this varies with each person)
 - ◇ Colds or flu

Asthma can't always be prevented, but if detected early, there are many new and effective treatments. **If you have been diagnosed with asthma**, share your health history with your family members. Encourage them to make healthy lifestyle choices that protect their lungs and help reduce their risk of asthma.

For More Information

Asthma Initiative of Michigan
www.getastmahelp.org

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America—
Michigan Chapter
www.aafamich.org



American Lung Association
www.lungusa.org