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Asthma: Symptoms of Difficulty Breathing

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Topic Overview

It is important to know the symptoms of difficulty breathing in asthma. If you or your child is having trouble breathing, follow your asthma action plan.

Mild difficulty breathing

You are having mild difficulty breathing if:

- Your breathing is slightly faster than normal.
- Your skin color is normal.

Moderate difficulty breathing

Symptoms of moderate difficulty breathing include:

- Obviously breathing faster than normal.
- Tiring quickly during talking or eating. You may have to catch your breath during eating. The difficulty during eating may lead to poor nutrition.
- Using your abdominal (belly) muscles to assist breathing. The abdominal wall collapses inward instead of expanding outward when you breathe in.
- Having skin color—especially on the face, hands, and feet—that is pale to slightly gray, or lacy purple and pale (mottled). But your tongue, gums, and lips remain pink.

Severe difficulty breathing

Symptoms of severe difficulty breathing include:

- Breathing very fast. Children usually grunt with each breath. Shortness of breath can interfere with the ability to speak smoothly.
- Appearing anxious and being unable to eat because it's too hard to breathe.

- Using the neck, chest, and abdominal muscles to breathe; the skin between, above, and under the ribs collapses inward with each breath. The person also may open his or her nostrils wide when breathing in.
- Taking longer than usual to breathe out and sometimes having a high-pitched, musical sound when breathing in.
- Sitting up, leaning forward, or sitting with the nose tilted up as if sniffing the air.
- Having skin color that is persistently pale, gray, bluish, or mottled, including the tongue, lips, earlobes, and nail beds.

Credits

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