Knowing How to React During an Asthma Attack Could Save a Life

by BRENDA VANTA

How to Treat an Asthma Attack

Wondering how to treat an asthma attack? Below are some general guidelines recommended by doctors, however, remember that the best way to deal with an acute episode is to follow the instructions given by your doctor (the asthma plan).

If you experience an acute episode of asthma:

1. Try to sit up, with your spine straight, do not lie down.
2. Try to stay as calm as possible, as anxiety could further aggravate your symptoms.
3. Take one puff of your reliever inhaler every 30-60 seconds, up to 10 puffs.
4. If the symptoms (i.e. coughing, wheezing, chest tightness, breathing problems) become worse while using the inhaler, or if you don't feel better after 10 puffs, if you can't speak, eat or drink because of the breathing problems or if you are worried at any time, call an ambulance.
5. If you are in a remote area, and the ambulance takes more than 15 minutes to arrive, you can repeat step #3.
6. Make sure you bring your asthma plan recommended by your doctor to the hospital, so the health professionals will have the details about the medicine you are taking.

How to Treat an Asthma Attack Without an Inhaler

Talk to your doctor and see what you can use in an emergency in case you don't have an inhaler. Dr Hubbard, MD suggests that the epinephrine (Epipen) used for allergic reactions could be a life-saver if you have an asthma attack with no inhaler handy. The over the counter decongestant, pseudoephedrine (Sudafed) may also help, although you should be aware of potential side effects (i.e. increased blood pressure and heart rate, urinary problems in case of an enlarged prostate).

After an Asthma Attack

Try to rest well, and make an appointment with your GP within 2 days after the attack. The doctors from hospital may also want to see you after one month to review your treatment plan and assess your condition.

Prevention

1. **Avoid as much as possible the well known triggers** - smoking, allergies, emotional and physical stress. Exercise can also induce an episode, but you can reduce the risk if you warm up slowly, and avoid activities that involve long periods of exertion such as distance running, basketball, cold weather sports (skiing, ice hockey, ice skating). You should exercise, because staying active and fit can help reduce prevent asthma attacks but choose your exercises wisely- swimming, aerobics, walking and running on a treadmill are more suitable.

2. **Learn breathing techniques such as Buteyko technique, papworth technique or pranayama (used in yoga)** - these breathing methods appear to be beneficial to help prevent an asthma attack.
3. **Eat a clean diet, with plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, and healthy oils (olive oil, fish)** - Keep your body well-hydrated with water. It’s okay to drink a cup or two of coffee and tea, as they contain chemical substances similar with theophylline (an old anti-asthma drug).