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Asthma is easily manageable through strict control measures: Doctors

SYMPTOMS VARY FROM ONE ANOTHER, WITH COUGHING AND WHEEZING BEING THE MOST COMMON

By Nourhan El-Sebawy

Asthma is the most common chronic inflammatory disease of the airways. It is a condition in which the airways narrow and swell and then produce extra mucus. This can make breathing difficult and trigger coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath. Professor of chest diseases and allergies at Ain Shams University Tarek Safwat told Daily News Egypt during the fourteenth regional assembly of the Egyptian Society of Bronchology.

He said that, for some, asthma is a minor irritation but for others can be a major problem that severely interferes with daily activities and may lead to a life-threatening asthma attack. Asthma cannot be totally cured but its symptoms can be easily controlled.

Safwat said that people with asthma experience symptoms when the airways tighten, inflame, or become filled with mucus. Common asthma symptoms might include coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness, pain, or pressure especially at night.



Ashraf Madkour

Tarek Safwat

Adel Khatab

Not every person with asthma has the same symptoms. People may have all of these symptoms specifically or have different symptoms at different times. Asthma symptoms may also vary from one asthma attack to the next, mild once, and severe another time.

He said some people with asthma may go for long periods without displaying any symptoms, periodically interrupted by worsening symptoms called asthma attacks. Others might have asthma symptoms every day.

As for treatment, professor of chest diseases and allergies at Ain Shams University, Adel Khatab, told Daily News Egypt that prevention and long term control are essential in stopping asthma attacks before they have even occur. He said treatment usually involves learning asthma triggers, taking steps to avoid them, and tracking breathing to make sure the daily asthma medications are keeping symptoms under control.

Khatab said that the right medications depend on a number of aspects, such as age, symptoms, asthma triggers, and what works best to keep asthma under control. He said preventive, long-term control medications reduce the inflammation in

airways that leads to the symptoms. Quick-relief inhalers quickly open swollen airways that limit breathing. In some cases, allergy medications are necessary. Long-term asthma control medications, generally taken daily, are the cornerstone of asthma treatment. These medications keep asthma under control on a day-to-day basis and make it less likely for an asthma attack.

Khatab clarified that corticosteroids in medication or inhalers are not dangerous and do not lead to obesity as many people believe. The medication treats asthma and includes small doses of corticosteroids that are not harmful and is the most effective medications to treat asthma.

Further, professor of chest diseases and allergies at Ain Shams University Ashraf Madkour said asthma cannot be totally cured but can easily be controlled by avoiding asthma triggers, quitting smoking which is top priority, following a treatment plan, and regularly using medications. He said people can easily live with asthma if it is controlled well and treated regularly.



6 common triggers of asthma

The main cause of asthma is not fully known to date. The strongest risk factors for developing asthma are a combination of genetic predisposition with environmental exposure to irritant substances and particles that may provoke allergic reactions or irritate the airways. The genetic links are not well understood, however studies found that if a parent has asthma, his/her offspring are twice as likely to suffer from it than a child whose parents do not have asthma.

Researchers are trying to understand the role of genes in suffering from asthma. There is a theory that indicates that there are people with genetically programmed responses to oxidative stress, a damaging chemical reaction within the body that results from stressors in the environment. According to the Egyptian Scientific Society of Bronchology, the most common asthma triggers include:

Smoking

Smoking is at the top of asthma triggers and smokers are most likely to get asthma. This also applies to passive smoking. If they studies found that children born to mothers, who were smoking during pregnancy or who live in a home that has a smoking parent, are at increased risk of developing asthma. People who smoke cigarettes are more likely to get asthma, and those who suffer from asthma and continue to smoke, display more severe symptoms, such as coughing and wheezing.

Cleaning products

Spray cleaners, including glass cleaners, furniture cleaners, diluted bleach, de-greasers, and air fresheners, are all on the list of possible asthma triggers among

people who use them regularly more than once a week. Researchers found that employees in cleaning occupations are at a higher risk in developing asthma than those who use spray cleaners at home.

A study published in the American Journal of Respiratory Critical Care Medicine indicated over 3,000 adults who did not have asthma when the study began. The researchers found that adults who used cleaning sprays more than once a week suffered from asthmatic attacks, and the risk of asthma increased as the use of sprays increased.

Allergens

Allergens are substances that disturb lung airways and are linked to developing asthma. Some common allergens include pollen, grasses, molds, pet hair, and dust mites. The asthmatic attacks of people who are allergic to pollen are very extensive during the spring and early months of the summer. On the other hand, people who are allergic to dust mites could encounter asthma symptoms along the year.

Air pollution

A recent research found that gas heaters and stoves as a source of nitrogen dioxide, therefore increasing the risk of asthma in young children.

Air fresheners

Air freshener sprayed or plugged into the wall can lead to sneezing and wheezing. Fragrances can trigger asthma and may lead also to allergic reactions.

Weather

Cold air and changes in temperature can cause asthma. Humidity may also trigger asthmatic attacks.

A link between food and asthma?

Despite lack of concrete evidence, some experts say certain foods may trigger breathing problems



The breathing condition asthma affects millions of people, causing difficulty breathing, a tightness in the chest and coughing. In more serious cases, sufferers may have "asthma attacks" - which involve a feeling of being suffocated, a condition only relieved by the use of inhalers.

There are many obvious causes of asthma, including smoking, polluted air, lung infections and airborne allergens such as dust-mites or pollen. However, some health experts believe that certain foods may also act as triggers to the condition, although conclusive scientific proof is currently lacking.

According to information published on the website of the Mayo Clinic in the United States, suspicion mostly falls on foods containing sulphites. These are naturally occurring

substances found in fruit juice, jam, dried fruit, potatoes, prawns, pre-cooked meats, beer and wine.

Some researchers believe that food additives, food colourings or preservatives, including the artificial sweetener aspartame, might also trigger asthma. And it is these additives

that mostly account for the concern over pre-cooked meals.

According to the WebMD website, a food allergy is defined as an abnormal reaction by the body's immune system to proteins in foods that usually are either safe or harmless. Specific examinations

and tests on skin can be made to determine whether there is sensitivity to specific foods.

The most common symptoms of allergies are vomiting, hives, rashes and diarrhoea.

Food intolerance, on the other hand, is an abnormal response of the body to an ingested food that is not an allergy. Examples of this include food poisoning and reactions from food and drinks such as caffeine.

Anybody who suspects their food has triggered an unpleasant reaction - whether it be asthma or anything else - should consult a doctor immediately.

Once the problem has been identified by a specialist, the most effective way to avoid further problems is to simply to avoid that food or anything containing it.

Is asthma linked to stress?

If you are asthmatic, reducing anxiety can help you manage the respiratory condition better, a new study has shown.

The study's findings show that when people with high level of anxiety also have asthma, their symptoms can be far more debilitating and dangerous, because they find it difficult to manage their asthma.

One of the researchers of the study, Alison McIsaac, who is an associate professor of psychology at University of Cincinnati in the United States, said anxiety sensitivity not only helps in explaining why higher rates of anxiety disorders have taken place, but also why anxiety is linked with poorer asthma outcomes.

According to the website Medical

Xpress, the research included 101 college undergraduates who said they have asthma. The experiment aimed to imitate asthma symptoms by making participants in the study breathe in and out through a very narrow straw, about the width of a coffee stirrer.

The researchers found that people with greater anxiety sensitivity not only reported higher anxiety during the straw-breathing task, but also experienced greater asthma symptoms and decreased lung functionality.

In conclusion, the research recommended interventions for anxiety sensitivity, such as exposure therapy aimed at reducing the anxiety.



Findings will be presented at the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive

Therapies (ABCT) 49th annual convention in Chicago.

Advice and figures

Advice

According to the Egyptian Scientific Society of Bronchology, asthma can be prevented in many ways. Be sure to:

- Use an air conditioner with a clean air filter. Stop using an old air conditioner if it smells musty.
- Let air circulate inside the house by opening the windows for at least three

- hours daily, unless the weather is humid.
- Check for allergies to animals. If you have pets or any other animals, you should go for medical examination to check if they are causing allergies or not. If you find that you are allergic to an animal, you should not keep them at all.
- Stop smoking immediately if you are an asthmatic person. If you are not, you

- should also stop smoking and avoid passive smoking.
- Avoid any asthma triggers such as cleaners, air fresheners, and perfumes.
- Make sure that the house is clean and empty of cockroaches and other insects because they can trigger asthma.
- Clean curtains, carpets, furniture, and any other objects that easily contain dust.

Figures

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), it is estimated that 235 million people worldwide suffer from asthma. Over 80% of asthma deaths occur in low and lower-middle income countries.

According to the American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology:

- It is estimated that the number of people with asthma worldwide will increase to be more than 100 million by 2025.
- Workplace conditions such as exposure to fumes, gases, or dust are responsible for 11% of asthma cases worldwide.
- About 70% of asthmatic people worldwide

- also have allergies.
- Nearly 250,000 people worldwide die each year from asthma. Almost all of those deaths were avoidable.
- Occupational asthma contributes largely to the global burden of asthma, as nearly 15% of asthma is amongst adults.

