

CLUW News Health Tip

ASTHMA

Asthma is one of the most common chronic health disorders faced by adults and children. It is one of the leading causes of absence from work and school. The incidence of the disease is on the rise, although advances have been made in care and management.

Asthma symptoms are usually triggered by something that irritates the airway. Respiratory infections such as colds or flu are common triggers. When air passages are inflamed and hyper-sensitive, other triggers may set off an attack. These may be cigarette smoke, strenuous exercise, cold or rainy weather, pollen, mold, dust and air pollutants. Asthma attacks can be frightening. Symptoms include difficulty breathing, tightness in the chest, coughing, and a fast pulse and respiratory rate. Wheezing usually occurs, but sometimes no wheezing can be heard when a person is having a severe attack.

Short acting bronchodilators can counteract an asthma attack. Albuterol is a common broncho-dilating medication that works quickly. It comes in a metered dose inhaler and is considered a “rescue” medication. It is important to learn how to use the inhaler properly in order to get the full benefit of the medication. Persons with asthma usually need to carry this medication with them at all times. However, if it is needed daily, this is a signal that additional care may be needed.

The goal of good asthma management is to reduce the inflammation and sensitivity of the airways in order to prevent asthma attacks. Avoiding triggers is one way to do this. Another way is the use of medications to reduce inflammation and thereby prevent asthma attacks. Many medications are prescribed for this purpose. Most come in metered dose inhalers and must be taken on a regular basis to prevent asthma symptoms. The most common ones contain steroids which effectively control airway inflammation, but have little effect on other parts of the body when they are inhaled. These medications have made adequate asthma control possible for millions of people when they are taken on a regular basis. They are not short acting bronchodilators, and are not to be used in the event of an acute attack. They are ineffective as a rescue medication but very helpful as a preventive measure.

Persons may be diagnosed with mild, moderate, or severe asthma. Those with symptoms that occur daily should ask for a referral to an allergy/asthma specialist. Your doctor should make certain that you know how to use inhaled medications correctly, and that you understand the difference in the types of inhalant medications that may be prescribed to treat your asthma.