

Asthma: Part 2

Lynnda Campbell, CFNP

Last month we discussed what asthma was and what symptoms were typical with a child with this condition. This month we will focus on the treatment options for asthma so that this chronic condition will have the least negative impact on your child's everyday life.

Children with asthma will typically have triggers that will irritate the airways and cause asthma symptoms such as coughing and wheezing. The first consideration in treating asthma is to identify and limit your child's exposure to them. One strong common trigger is cigarette smoke. Parents or other adult caretakers may assume that simply smoking outside will limit the child's second-hand smoke exposure. However, the smoke that lingers on clothes and hair can cause asthma symptoms to appear. Other triggers include dust, pet dander, viral infections, and pollens. Thus, you should limit the amount of dust in your home through frequent dusting and installation of hardwood floors if possible. There are hypoallergenic dogs, such as poodles, who do not shed that may be a good choice for a pet. Also, consider keeping your child indoors on exceptionally hot days with high pollen counts. Washing clothes and bathing after being outdoors can also help.

Medications are frequently needed with those with asthma to keep symptoms limited even with avoiding triggers as much as possible. These medications frequently fall into two categories, bronchodilators and anti-inflammatories. Bronchodilators work by expanding the airways, allowing more air into the lungs. Anti-inflammatories, or inhaled corticosteroids, work by reducing the inflammation in the airways which is frequently present with asthma. If your child is experiencing symptoms of asthma that require treatment with a bronchodilator more than twice a week, most doctors recommend daily anti-inflammatory medication. These medications are typically administered through a nebulizer or inhaler. When using an inhaler, it is important to have your child use a spacer (chamber) and mask. This makes it easier for the medication to reach the lungs and leaves less medication deposited in the mouth.

Most likely, if your child has been diagnosed with asthma your pediatrician or asthma doctor will have given you an asthma action plan. The plan will aide you in knowing how to treat your child's symptoms at different severity levels daily. To help your child lead the fullest life possible while managing his/ her asthma, it is important to follow this plan and to let your doctor know if there are problems while taking the medications as directed.