



Asthma and Anaphylaxis

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Q 1: What is asthma?

Asthma is a medical condition that affects a person's ability to breathe. People with asthma experience a narrowing of the airways in the lungs, making it harder to breathe in and out. Regular medication to prevent narrowing of the airways can make it possible for people with asthma to lead normal, active lives.

People with asthma often have at least one of the following symptoms:

- Wheezing, which is a high-pitched sound coming from the chest, usually while breathing out.
- Persistent, irritable coughing, especially at night.
- A feeling of not being able to get enough air or being short of breath.
- Tightness and heaviness in the chest.
- Wheezing or coughing with exercise (exercise-induced bronchoconstriction).

Q 2: Does asthma increase the risk of anaphylaxis?

Asthma, food allergy and high risk of anaphylaxis (the most severe allergic reaction) often occur together.

Asthma is known to increase the risk of fatal anaphylaxis.

If you are at risk of anaphylaxis, it is important to make sure your asthma is well managed. See your doctor if you need to use your reliever medication more than usual. They may review your medications and your asthma management plan.

Q 3: What should you do if you have asthma and anaphylaxis?

Always give adrenaline (epinephrine) injector device first, and then asthma reliever puffer if someone with known asthma and allergy to food, insects or medication (who may have been exposed to the allergen) has sudden breathing difficulty (including wheeze, persistent cough or hoarse voice) even if there are no skin symptoms.

The symptoms of an asthma attack and anaphylaxis are very similar and it can be hard to tell the difference. Wheezing, difficulty breathing and a persistent cough can occur in both asthma and anaphylaxis. If someone has sudden breathing difficulty soon after eating or drinking, an insect sting or medications, this may be anaphylaxis, not asthma.

Allergic reactions can be unpredictable. Symptoms can be mild, moderate or severe and occur at any time after exposure. Most food related allergic reactions start within 20 minutes but can also appear up to two hours after eating. Mild to moderate allergic reaction symptoms may or may not occur before anaphylaxis.

If you have asthma and have been prescribed adrenaline devices, and suddenly start to have difficulty breathing, follow the ASCIA Action Plan for Anaphylaxis, then continue asthma first aid. If in doubt, use your adrenaline device first.

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