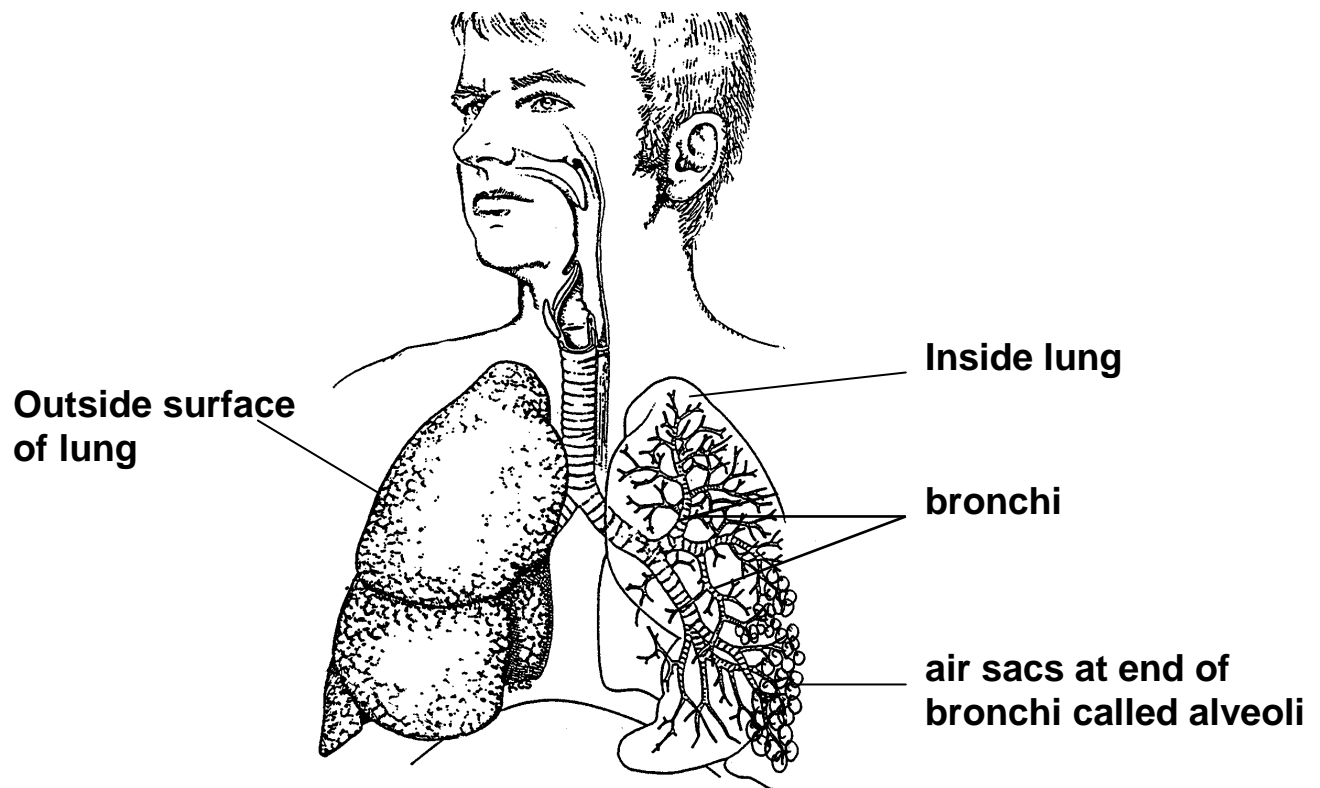

Asthma

What is asthma?

Asthma is a condition in the lungs where there is inflammation of the bronchi. Bronchi are also called breathing tubes or airways. The inflammation causes the symptoms of shortness of breath, chest tightness, wheezing, coughing and production of mucus or sputum. Each person has his or her symptoms and these can change over time.

In many people, the bronchi can be very sensitive to substances or events called triggers. The bronchi swell and produce mucus. At the same time, the muscles in the walls of the bronchi tighten. This makes it harder to breathe. You may also wheeze, have a tight chest, cough and bring up sputum.



What are triggers?

The most important triggers are:

1. Allergens that people become allergic to such as dust mites, animal dander, pollen and mould.
2. Colds or chest infections in the bronchial tubes called bronchitis.
3. Certain chemicals, particularly at work.
4. Exercise and cold air.
5. Irritants such as cigarette smoke, dust, fumes, strong smells.
6. Medications such as:
 - Acetylsalicylic acid or ASA found in many pain relieving medications such as aspirin
 - Some anti-arthritis and pain relieving medications called **Non-Steroidal Anti-inflammatory Drugs** or **NSAIDs**.
 - Medications for heart, eyes and blood pressure, containing beta-blockers, in people with asthma.

All of these triggers can make the bronchi narrow in people who already have asthma especially if it is not well controlled.

Allergens, chest infections and certain chemicals can cause asthma in people who do not already have it. Allergens are the most frequent cause of asthma. Allergens cause inflammation and are important to avoid when possible.

ASA and NSAIDs in some people with asthma can cause dangerously severe attacks.

Beta-blocker medication in people with asthma can cause dangerously severe attacks.

Asthma is not caused by emotions but emotions can make asthma feel worse.

How is asthma controlled?

Asthma is controlled by:

- avoiding triggers that affect you especially allergens and chemicals at work
- learning how to control your asthma with medications
- taking asthma medication regularly

What are the signs of good asthma control?

Signs of good control:

- You have no symptoms most of the time.
- Coughing, wheezing or being short of breath does not disturb your sleep.
- You do not have symptoms when you wake up.
- Symptoms do not interfere with day to day activities including exercise.
- Symptoms are controlled with the least amount of medication.
- You use your Reliever rapid relief medication, as needed, less than 4 doses a week. This does not count the daily dose you might use when you exercise.