TRANSCRIPT

Asthma is a disease that affects your lungs, making it harder to breathe.

The symptoms of asthma are warning signs for you to take action. In fact, if you neglect them, you are more likely to have an asthma attack. The attack could ruin your day, or even lead to a trip to the emergency room.

Let's look at your airways, and learn why it's so difficult to breathe when you have asthma symptoms.

When you breathe, air travels into the nose or mouth. The air moves down the trachea, or windpipe, into the airways. These airways are a series of tubes that end at the alveoli. Alveoli are tiny balloon-like air sacs that transfer oxygen into the blood, and allow carbon dioxide to exit. There are over 300 million alveoli in our lungs!

But when you have asthma, your airways, or the tubes which carry air in and out of the lungs, are very sensitive. That means if you breathe in certain elements in your environment, called triggers, your airways react in a few ways.

In the presence of a trigger, the airways become inflamed and swollen. As a result, your airways narrow. Excessive mucus is produced, which further clogs the airways. And the muscles around the airways can tighten up, or spasm, narrowing them even further.

These reactions to a trigger greatly affect the amount of air that can travel through the airways. Oxygen entering your body is reduced and the amount of carbon dioxide in your body can build up.

During an asthma attack, reactions in the airways can be felt as: excessive coughing, difficulty breathing, wheezing, or tightness in the chest. These symptoms might happen during the day, or wake you up at night.

> *"Imagine if you're breathing through a straw, and someone is blocking the straw slowly. Then it gets to the point where it's very difficult to pull air through that straw."*

If you have questions about your asthma, ask your healthcare provider. You can learn the skills you need in order to prevent or lessen your symptoms, and help you cope with having asthma on a daily basis.

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