**Asthma Attacks & Emergencies**

Asthma attacks occur when the airways in your lungs become swollen and narrowed down, which makes breathing difficult.  Signs of a bad asthma attack include coughing, wheezing, chest tightness or shortness of breath that doesn’t seem to improve despite using your rescue medication, such as your albuterol inhaler, every 4 hours.     
  
This situation can make it difficult to sleep, talk, or perform your usual activities.  When your asthma gets bad, it can cause coughing attacks, sometimes to the point of vomiting, a lot of wheezing, and a hard time breathing.     
  
A bad asthma attack can also be very dangerous, because you can pass out or even die if you cannot breathe.     
  
When you start feeling like your asthma is getting worse, it's important to take your rescue inhaler right away and not ignore the symptoms, because symptoms of asthma can progress quickly.   
  
There are people who sometimes don't pay much attention to the symptoms that they're experiencing.  If you're not paying attention to early warning signs, such as coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath, things can potentially get out of control.   
  
You can die from asthma.  Even people whose asthma seems very mild can die from a severe asthma attack.  If you cannot breathe, you cannot live. There are signs to watch out for, and then there is what we call an asthma action plan to follow when your symptoms are starting to get worse.     
  
So the first thing to do if you're having coughing, wheezing, chest tightness or shortness of breath is to use your rescue inhaler. Most people will use anywhere from two to four puffs every four to six hours as needed. The red flag for me, which I share with my patients, is that if you can't make it to four hours before you need your next dose of rescue inhaler then you need to get some help.   
  
If you take four puffs of your rescue inhaler or use what we call a nebulizer machine to deliver a mist treatment and there's no improvement in how you're feeling, its time to start thinking about getting help.  You can do another four puffs from your rescue inhaler or another breathing treatment 20 minutes later.  If you are not feeling better after that, you need to get help quickly.    
  
If your rescue medication is not working and you are still having trouble breathing after using your rescue inhaler or your nebulizer machine or you need to get to the emergency room right away.  If you're are having difficulty talking, or if your lips or fingernails start turning blue, call 911 immediately.   
  
The emergency responders will have oxygen, which is one of the things you critically need at this point.   
  
When you get to the emergency room, you may receive extra medicine such as extra breathing treatments or a steroid medicine to calm the swelling in your lungs.    
  
After an asthma attack, you should talk to your doctor to see if your asthma medicine regimen needs to be adjusted, to prevent further attacks and keep you breathing well.