**Asthma Overview**

Asthma is a condition that can affect the lungs and can make it difficult to breathe. Our lungs are shaped like upside-down trees, with breathing tubes that are like branches that carry air and oxygen into our bodies.

When the lungs are working well, the walls of the breathing tubes are thin and the muscles that wrap around the outside of the breathing tubes are relaxed, so air flows in and out easily. However, when people are having trouble with asthma, the walls of the breathing tubes get swollen, the muscles around the breathing tubes tighten down, and the inside of the breathing tubes fill up with mucus, making it difficult for air and oxygen to flow through.

Asthma symptoms are caused by swelling, narrowing and irritation of the breathing tubes. Common asthma symptoms include coughing, wheezing (which is a whistling noise when you breathe), tightness in the chest, and difficulty breathing. For children, a bothersome cough may be the only symptom of asthma.

Certain things can cause asthma to get worse. The most common trigger for worsening asthma is exposure to a virus, like the virus that causes the common cold. Other asthma triggers include things that can irritate the lungs, such as smoke, dust, air pollution, or even cold air. People who are allergic to cats, dogs, or pollen may find their asthma getting worse when they are exposed to the things they are allergic to. Asthma symptoms can make it difficult to exercise, sleep, or perform normal activities such as school, work, sports, and hobbies. Asthma can also lead to attacks, which can cause serious breathing problems and can be very dangerous or even fatal. For all of these reasons, it’s important to take control of your asthma so that you can breathe well!

Asthma can make life difficult, but it can be controlled! Don’t smoke and try not to be around people who are smoking. Avoid other asthma triggers as well, including dust, fumes, cleaning fluids, and air pollution. Work with your doctor to create a treatment plan. Following an asthma treatment plan will help you breathe well and THRIVE!

There is no cure for asthma. However, most people with asthma can breathe well with the use of daily or as needed medicine. When treating asthma, the first decision that needs to be made, and it's an important one, is to decide whether the person has intermittent asthma or persistent asthma, because the treatments are very different. The treatment plan that you need depends on how often you are having asthma symptoms. If you have asthma symptoms only about once a week, or even less frequently, like every few weeks or few months, then you have intermittent asthma, and all you need is a rescue medicine.

A rescue medicine is an inhaler that you take only when your asthma is bothering you. A rescue inhaler opens up your lungs quickly to relieve asthma symptoms. Most patients with asthma have intermittent asthma, so they don't need to take an asthma medicine everyday. They just need to have a rescue inhaler on-hand in case they run into problems with asthma.

But there are a lot of patients that have persistent asthma. If you have persistent asthma, then, you really need to take asthma medication everyday in order to breathe well. People with persistent asthma will be bothered by asthma more than twice a week, or wake up with asthma symptoms more than twice a month, unless they take asthma controller medicine everyday.

Asthma controller medicine is very different from asthma rescue medicine. Asthma controller medicine calms swelling and irritation in the lungs to prevent asthma symptoms. Using asthma controller medicine consistently can help people with persistent asthma breathe more easily, sleep better, and do all the things they enjoy. However, asthma controller medicine will not give immediate relief of asthma symptoms. People with persistent asthma should carry a rescue inhaler with them, in addition to taking asthma controller medicine every day as prescribed.

There are several different types of asthma controller medicines. Your doctor can help you decide which type of asthma controller medicine is best for you. Most asthma controller medicines are either pills or inhaled medication. If you have persistent asthma, it is very important to take your asthma controller medicine every day, as prescribed by your doctor, to prevent asthma symptoms. Your doctor may adjust the dose of your asthma controller medicine, or even switch to a different medicine, depending on how much your asthma is bothering you.

Inhaled medication is usually the first choice in treating persistent asthma, as inhaled medicine goes directly into the lungs. Inhaled asthma controller medicine works best for most people. For some people, a pill can work very well as an asthma controller medicine. Work with your doctor to determine whether your asthma is intermittent asthma or persistent asthma and to decide which asthma medicine is best for you. Finding the right asthma treatment plan will help you breathe easier, enjoy life more and avoid asthma attacks.