Asthma is a lung disease that makes it harder to move air in and out of your lungs and is a serious health problem for which there is no cure. However, asthma is successfully controllable with proper medical treatment to enable you to live a normal, healthy life.

The exact cause of asthma is not known. However, we do know genetics, allergies, respiratory infections, and environmental irritants all play important roles in causing asthma. If your parents have asthma, chances are more likely you will develop asthma. Certain allergies are linked to people who get asthma. If your parents have allergies, there is a good chance you will suffer from allergies as well. Lung development can be compromised if you had certain respiratory infections as a youngster that can lead to long term damaged lung tissue. Contact with allergens, certain irritants, or exposure to viral infections as a youngster have been linked to developing asthma. Irritants and air pollution may also play a significant role in adult-onset asthma.

People who have asthma have hypersensitive airways. Their lungs react to things people without asthma do not. Asthma causes significant changes in the lungs making it difficult to breathe. When you have asthma, inflammation is always there, even when you are not symptomatic. Another significant change in the lungs is bronchial constriction which narrows the airways decreasing the airflow. A third change that takes place in the lungs with a person who has asthma is an increase in mucus secretion making it more difficult to breathe. When an asthma patient comes into contact with asthma triggers such as pollen and tobacco smoke, these changes in the lungs take place forcing the patient into an asthma attack, episode, or flare up.

**Asthma triggers include:**

- Respiratory infections (cold, flu, sinus infection)
- Food and medicines (peanuts, shellfish, aspirin)
- Smoke
- Weather, pollen and air pollution
- Animals (dander and saliva)
- Pests
- Mold
- Exercise
- Emotions (anger, fear, stress)
- Strong odors (perfumes and cleaning supplies)

After an asthma attack, you will probably feel tired. For several days after an episode, you are at increased risk of having another flare-up. It is recommended you avoid your asthma triggers, monitor your symptoms, and continue asthma management so as to
prevent airway remodeling. Airway remodeling is a serious condition that happens when asthma is untreated or poorly managed. The lungs become scarred, asthma medicines do not work as well, and less air is able to move through the airways.

Once your healthcare provider makes a diagnosis of asthma, you will be prescribed medicines (anti-inflammatory, corticosteroids, and/or antibiotics) to help control your asthma. Other treatment options for asthma include bronchodilators (short acting and long acting), a combination of both medication and bronchodilators, and a flu vaccination. It is recommended if you suffer with asthma you have a yearly flu vaccination due to the fact you are at greater risk for serious complications such as pneumonia if you contract influenza.

It is important that you work with your healthcare provider on an asthma action plan designed specifically for your needs. An asthma action plan provides key information on when to take your medicines on a daily basis and what to do in an emergency. This will help you take control of your asthma so you can live a healthy and productive life.

There is no cure for asthma, but a treatment plan designed for you by your health care provider can improve your symptoms. Be sure to take your medications as prescribed for optimal benefits in controlling your asthma and preventing the risk of a life threatening episode.

Visit the Lehigh County intranet site to schedule your appointment at the Wellness Centre.