

## ASTHMA

Asthma is a reversible lung disease that involves 2 main processes:

1. Inflammation of the airway, which results in swelling and mucous buildup in the airways
2. Bronchoconstriction or tightening of the airway

Due to the combination of these processes, children may have a prolonged or night time cough, difficulty breathing, chest tightness or heaviness and/or wheeze. Common triggers include viruses or colds, allergies, exercise, emotions (such as laughing or anger) and cold air. Each person may have some or all of these triggers.

Asthma is more likely to occur in children if they have had a history of eczema, food allergies, or environmental allergies and if there are other family members that have asthma.

### **Treatment**

Asthma is a treatable disease. Treatment is targeted at each of the above processes. Please refer to your Asthma Action Plan for the treatment prescribed by your pediatrician.

#### 1. *Controller Medication- Inhaled Corticosteroids (ICS)*

These are used to treat the underlying airway inflammation and are the main treatment for asthma. It is important that you use your child's inhaled corticosteroid as instructed by your pediatrician, as the inflammation may remain even if your child is improved. If we don't adequately treat the inflammation, children will be more prone to asthma exacerbations or "attacks". This means treating your child even when they have no symptoms.

- ICS are considered to be safe. Less than ¼ of the steroid enters the bloodstream, so most "typical steroid side effects" are rare.
- Your pediatrician may prescribe the ICS in 2 ways
  - Daily use of ICS alone (QVAR, Alvesco)
  - Use of ICS combined with a long acting bronchodilator (Symbicort, Advair)

#### 2. *Rescue Medication- Bronchodilators (eg. salbutamol/Ventolin)*

These are used for short term relief of airway tightening. They are generally used only on an as needed basis. Sometimes, your pediatrician may ask your child to use them before exercise.

- Please tell your pediatrician if you are using the bronchodilator more than 3 times per week on a regular basis.

### **Resources**

This handout is meant as a very brief overview of asthma. For more information, please visit "I Can Control Asthma Now" [www.ucalgary.ca/icancontrolasthma](http://www.ucalgary.ca/icancontrolasthma)

This is fantastic website with a lot of great educational resources including videos, information on device technique, and more! We encourage you to learn as much as possible about asthma and its management.