

Diagnosis of Asthma

How Is Asthma Diagnosed?

It is often difficult, especially in young children, to be entirely certain that asthma is the diagnosis. After a careful physical examination, your pediatrician will need to ask you specific questions about your child's health. The information you give your pediatrician will help determine if your child has asthma. Your pediatrician will need information about

- Your child's symptoms, such as wheezing, coughing, and shortness of breath
- What triggers the symptoms or when the symptoms get worse
- Medications that were tried and if they helped
- Any family history of allergies or asthma

It is very important that your pediatrician test your child's airway function. One way to do this is with a pulmonary function test using a device called a spirometer. This device measures the amount of air blown out of the lungs over time. Your pediatrician may also want to test your child's pulmonary function after giving her some asthma medication. This helps confirm that the blockage in the air passages that shows up on pulmonary function tests goes away with treatment.

Some children do not find relief from their symptoms even after using medications. If that is your child, your pediatrician may want to test your child for other conditions that can make asthma worse. These conditions include allergic rhinitis (hayfever), sinusitis (sinus infection), and gastroesophageal reflux disease (the process that causes heartburn).

It is important to remember that asthma is a complicated disease to diagnose, and the results of airway function testing may be normal even if your child has asthma. Also keep in mind that not all children with repeated episodes of wheezing have asthma. Some children are born with small lungs, and their air passages may get blocked by infections. As their lungs grow they no longer wheeze after an infection. This type of wheezing usually occurs in children without a family history of asthma and in children whose mothers smoked during pregnancy.

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