

# ASTHMA



July, 2012



**One of the more surprising facts about asthma is that it is such a common disease. More than 23 million Americans have the condition and ¼ of those are children younger than 18 years of age.**

## Understanding Asthma:

**Asthma** is the common chronic inflammatory disease of the airways characterized by variable and recurring symptoms, reversible airflow obstruction. The rates are steadily rising, though no one can state exactly why. There are probably many reasons for the increase. Not only are we learning more about what causes asthma, but we also have more accurate methods of diagnosing the disorder and better ways to treat it, even in very young children. Asthma may appear at any age; however, between 80% and 90% of children with asthma develop symptoms by age 4 or 5 years. Fortunately, in the vast majority of cases, symptoms are mild to moderately severe. When the condition is properly managed with medications and environmental measures, most severe, potentially incapacitating flare-ups can be prevented. There are often early warning signs that a child is at risk for developing asthma—eczema starting in the early months, frequent lower respiratory symptoms and problems appearing before the first birthday, and having a family history of asthma.

## Symptoms:

Many children suffer needlessly because those around them aren't aware of the warning signs of asthma and do not bring the signs to their pediatricians' attention. Asthma can masquerade for years as chronic or recurrent bronchitis, recurrent pneumonia, chronic cough, or lower respiratory infections. Discuss with your pediatrician the possibility that your child has asthma if he has these masquerading conditions. Also call your pediatrician for an appointment if your child

- Wheezes
- Coughs regularly, especially at night or with exertion
- Has a tight feeling in the chest
- Is often short of breath

Symptoms may not always be there; instead, they may occur occasionally, such as when your child plays energetically, laughs or cries, or sleeps. Perhaps you notice that your child wheezes or coughs when visiting a home in which someone smokes or has a cat. If symptoms come on at particular times, be sure to mention the circumstances to your pediatrician. The more facts your pediatrician has, the easier it is to diagnose asthma and the sooner treatment can start.