

Asthma – Myths versus Facts

What is asthma? Asthma is a chronic (long-term) disease that affects the lungs. In response to allergens, irritants or other stressors, the airways of people with asthma narrow, and swell and produce extra mucus, making breathing difficult. Asthma symptoms include coughing (especially at nighttime or early morning), wheezing, shortness of breath and chest tightness.

 **Myth:** Asthma isn't very common

 **FACT:** Asthma is one of the most common chronic diseases in Ohio and affects people of all ages

- In Ohio, about one in ten adults and one in seven children have asthma.¹

 **Myth:** Asthma isn't serious

 **FACT:** Asthma attacks can be a medical emergency

- Some asthma sufferers only have mild symptoms. Others have severe attacks that can interfere with daily activities or even be life-threatening if asthma is not properly managed.
- Each year in Ohio, asthma is the cause of approximately:
 - 20,000 hospitalizations, and
 - 70,000 emergency department visits.²
- About 155 Ohioans per year die from asthma.³

 **Myth:** Asthma is something that children grow out of

 **FACT:** Children often do not outgrow asthma

- Although a child's asthma can get better or worse over time, for most people, asthma is present the rest of their lives. In general, the more severe the asthma, the less likely the child is to outgrow it.⁴

 **Myth:** People with asthma can't be athletic

 **FACT:** Although asthma cannot be cured, people with well-controlled asthma can live healthy and active lives

- The idea that people with asthma are physically limited is a common misconception.
- Basketball player Dennis Rodman, soccer player David Beckham, football player Jerome Bettis and Olympic track athlete Jackie Joyner-Kersey are just a few of the famous athletes who have overcome their asthma and gone on to become champions.⁶

References: (1) Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) Survey, 2013. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; (2) Ohio Hospital Association (OHA). Statewide Clinical-Financial Database, 2005-2012; (3) Ohio Department of Health, Center for Vital and Health Statistics, Deaths 1990-2012; (4) Mayo Clinic. Do some children outgrow asthma? <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/childhood-asthma/expert-answers/outgrow-asthma/faq-20058116>; (5) AskOhio, 2013. Strategic Resource Group. <http://www.askohio.com/>; (6) Athletes With Asthma, <http://www.kidzworld.com/article/12999-athletes-with-asthma>; (7) National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI). Asthma Guidelines. <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-pro/resources/lung/naci/asthma-info/asthma-guidelines.htm>

Proper asthma care means: making regular doctor visits, working with a health care provider to develop and follow an asthma action plan, taking medications as directed, paying attention to asthma symptoms, taking action to stop attacks and learning to manage things that trigger asthma symptoms.⁷

