

Shedding Light On Nighttime Asthma



Have you noticed that your asthma symptoms are worse when you're trying to sleep? Your airways work best just before going to sleep; their function worsens the longer you sleep. Although not everyone with asthma notices a difference at night, symptoms may occur for the first time when you're sleeping. This is called nighttime, or nocturnal asthma.



If you've noticed more asthma symptoms at night, medication changes (or a different schedule for taking medicines) could help you avoid the worst symptoms. Nighttime asthma can occur any time during the night, so medications need to cover the whole period when you're sleeping. Some asthma medicines may keep you awake; work with your Primary Care Physician (PCP) to make sure you're taking the best medications at the best times to get a good night's sleep.

Not everyone with asthma loses sleep because of it. But if you've noticed increased symptoms which wake you up during the night or keep you awake, talk to your PCP. Sound sleep will help keep you healthy and breathing easy, day or night!



The reasons asthma might be worse during sleep are not completely clear, but may include:

- **lying down** - this puts extra pressure on airways and lungs. It also means that reflux of stomach acid can occur more easily, which in turn can make your airways react. If you have reflux, you may need to ask your Primary Care Physician (PCP) whether it would help to take a medication to reduce stomach acid at night.
- **nightly hormone changes** – your body has its own timetable, and hormones which affect the lungs can cause your airways to narrow slightly during sleep.
- **breathing colder, drier air** (especially if you sleep in an air-conditioned room) – this is an asthma trigger for some people. A humidifier can help to warm and moisten the air in your bedroom.
- **dust mites** (which may be an asthma trigger) - some ways to deal with these tiny critters: use a vacuum equipped with a filter which can trap dust mites; wash bedding in hot water weekly and dry in a hot dryer; cover your mattress and pillows with zippered, dust-proof covers. A humidifier in your bedroom can also help keep dust mites at bay.