

# Mayo Clinic Minute: When asthma attacks

1 October 2021, by Deb Balzer



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Asthma is a lung condition that causes swelling of the airways. It can make breathing difficult and trigger coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath. It's the most common chronic disease among children, though it affects adults, as well. More than 262 million people globally are affected by asthma and more than 461,000 have died due to the disease, according to the World Health Organization.

While there is no cure for [asthma](#), symptoms can be treated, says Dr. John Costello, a pulmonologist at Mayo Clinic Healthcare in London.

"The pathology of asthma is like the airway is narrow," says Dr. Costello. "They get inflamed. You get more mucus formed because the body responds to infection by making mucus because mucus carries infection away."

"Inhaled corticosteroids are a cornerstone of the treatment," Dr. Costello says.

And nights for those with asthma can be difficult.

"Bad asthma is almost always worse during the night for reasons that are not fully explained. Cough, wheeze and breathlessness are very often worse during the night, over recurrent nights," Dr. Costello says.

Dr. Costello says inhalation therapy is the treatment of choice, though [patients](#) who have severe asthma may require corticosteroids that are given orally or by IV.

"And if the patient's not responding, then admission to the hospital (is needed) to make sure that these medicines are administered efficiently," says Dr. Costello.

As for Max, Dr. Costello offers some good news: "When progressing from childhood into [adult life](#), asthma very often gets better in the early teens."

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