

The Asthma History

Presenting Signs and Symptoms:

- Wheeze
- Chest tightness
- Shortness of breath
- Rapid breathing
- Dry or productive cough

Especially characteristic if the symptoms are

- Recurrent
- Worse at night or early morning
- Obviously triggered by exercise, irritants, allergens or viral infection.

Severe asthma may present with

- Appearance of exhaustion and fear
- Inability to speak
- Lethargy due to hypercapnea
- Obvious cyanosis (!red flag!)
- Palpitations due to tachycardia

What to look for in the history:

- **Current symptoms:**
 - **severity**
 - exercise limitation?
 - Sleep disturbance? How often do they wake up at night?
 - **duration**
 - **aggravating factors-**
 - **ALLERGY? Is there ECZEMA? Very important**
 - Allergic rhinitis? Hay fever?
- **?Current medications unrelated to asthma?-beta-blockers or aspirin?**
- **Pattern of symptoms** (chronology of the illness over days/weeks)
- **Quality of Cough and any sputum** thus produced
- **Present management and its perceived effect**
 - eg, how often is the puffer used,
 - how many puffs are needed,
 - how long does a puffer last,
 - how it is used (properly?), etc
- **Previous hospitalisation**
 - (due to a chest complaint? Allergic reaction? ICU stay?)
- **Home and work environment**
 - ?dust, pollen, pets, chemicals?
 - Are they a florist or veterinarian?
 - Current smoker or lives with smokers?
 - Do the symptoms improve on the weekends?)
- **Impact of disease on lifestyle**
 - including ADLs, eg. cooking, cleaning, shopping, transport; as well as recreational activities, and work duties
 - -i.e how much work/school is missed due to asthma
- **Family history of atopy-** rashes, asthma, anaphylaxis?

Grading of Dyspnoea:

- I = on heavy exertion
- II = moderate exertion
- III = minimal exertion
- IV = at rest

