

Oranges, Asthma and ER's: the good, the bad and the ugly

By Kamyar Hedayat, M.D.

For every disaster, we need action plans before trouble strikes. The same is true of asthma, an inflammatory disease of the wind pipes in the lungs that causes difficulty breathing. It can be life-threatening if not properly treated. Nobody knows exactly why people get asthma, but we know it runs in families. To keep a child's asthma in control, make an asthma action plan with your doctor.

There are many triggers of an asthma attack such as smoke, mold, and dust mites. To avoid triggering an asthma attack, never smoke around children; keep the humidity to less than 50% and use a dehumidifier. Encase mattresses in allergen-proof covers, and clean bedding and washable toys once a week in hot water. Many children have asthma that is triggered during colds and allergies. Keep your children healthy by keeping a small bottle of waterless hand-sanitizer with you. Clean your children's hands before and after entering stores, school, restaurants, and public bathrooms.

The signs of asthma include shortness of breath, wheezing or "whistling" when breathing; some kids cough instead of wheezing. If your doctor has diagnosed your child with asthma, you should contact your doctor when you see these symptoms. Your child may benefit from starting breathing treatments, steroids, or medication to head off a full blown asthma attack.

Your physician needs to be a part of your plan. Discuss with him or her the signs of mild, moderate and severe asthma attacks. Keep track your child's breathing with a flow meter, and have the right type of medicine available. Albuterol is the most common medicine used for asthma. For kids less than four, Albuterol can be given as a liquid through a mist machine called a nebulizer. Older kids can use a puffer called an inhaler, along with a spacer, which makes the medicine three times as effective. Asthma gets worse late at night, so, make sure you have medicines before the pharmacy closes.

When your child does have an asthma attack, it's important to stay calm and keep your child calm. Dim the lights, speak softly, and use reassuring talk. Put on calming music or movies. Lavender oil can be calming. Put a drop on a handkerchief and wave it under their nose. Make plans for who can watch your other kids in case you have to take your child to the emergency room.

With severe asthma, a child may have difficulty speaking more than a word or two before catching their breath. Others signs include belly breathing, flaring nostrils and seeing the ribs pop up with breaths. If you see any of these signs, you should take your child immediately to the emergency room or call 911 for help.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Studies have shown that kids who eat less fast food and more fresh-cooked meals with whole wheat, vegetables, fish, and citrus fruits like oranges and kiwis have less asthma attacks. Keep your children healthy, happy and safe. Be prepared for an asthma attack if your child has asthma. Know when it's time to call your doctor, and when your child needs emergency care.

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