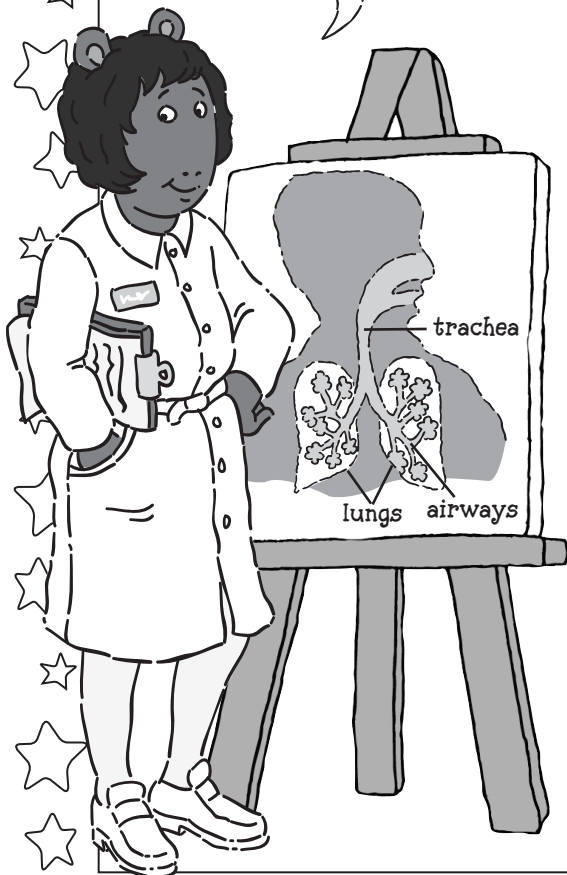


All About Asthma

This lesson plan helps young children and their families learn about asthma. To introduce this unit, show the ARTHUR episode, "Buster's Breathless," available at pbskids.org/arthur/health. Share the background information below with children as you do the activities on page 2.



1 in every 10 school-aged children has an asthma diagnosis.



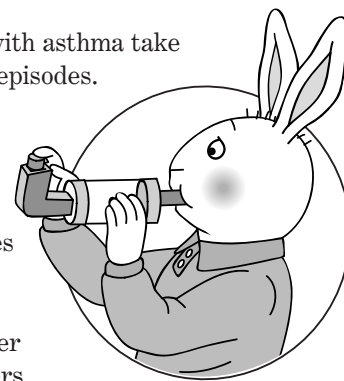
Background Information

What is asthma? People with asthma have very sensitive airways in their lungs. Triggers such as dust or mold can cause the airways to swell and the muscles around the airways to constrict, making it difficult to breathe. This can make the person cough, wheeze, or feel tightness in the chest. While there is no cure for asthma, with proper treatment people with asthma can lead healthy and active lives.

What causes an asthma episode? Many things can trigger an asthma episode. Common indoor triggers include: secondhand smoke, dust mites, mold, cockroaches, and strong odors and fumes. Outdoor triggers include: pollens, pollution, cold air, and changes in temperature. Intense crying or laughing, colds and viral infections can also cause asthma episodes. It is important for a child with asthma to know his/her own triggers and how to avoid them. For helpful tips on minimizing exposure to triggers, visit the Arthur Family Health Web site at pbskids.org/arthur/health. You may also want to download "Clearing the Air: 10 Steps to Making Your Home Asthma-Friendly" at <http://www.epa.gov/asthma/parents.html#parents>.

How is asthma treated? Many children with asthma take a daily controller medicine to prevent asthma episodes. They also use quick-relief medicine. Exercise can trigger asthma episodes, so some children take medicine before they go out to play, especially in cold weather. Many asthma medicines come in the form of a spray that goes directly to the lungs dispensed by an inhaler. Doctors can help children learn to use a peak flow meter to monitor their asthma, take proper medication, and identify and avoid their triggers.

Family and school communication. Because asthma is so widespread, it is important for families to know about the disease. Encourage the families of students with asthma to work with their physician or school nurse to complete an Asthma Treatment Plan (included), listing the medicines the child should take in various situations and the people to contact. Encourage families to share the Asthma Treatment Plan with friends and relatives as well.



Activities

Watch and discuss “Buster’s Breathless.” Ask children:

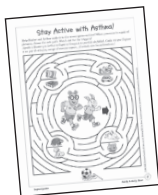
- *What things triggered Buster’s asthma episode?*
- *What did the doctor tell Buster and his mom?*
- *Francine was afraid of catching asthma germs from Buster. What would you tell her?*
- *Can Buster still run around and play with his friends? How can he help himself not get asthma attacks?*

All About Asthma. Distribute and discuss the “All About Asthma by Buster” coloring sheet (included). Encourage students to share their own experiences and knowledge about asthma. Invite the school nurse or a parent with asthma to visit the class and show devices such as an inhaler and a peak flow meter.

What does asthma feel like? Give each child a drinking straw. Ask children to breathe through the straw and give a “thumbs up” sign if it is easy to breathe, or a “thumbs down” sign if it is hard. Then ask them to slowly pinch the straw as they continue breathing, and again give the thumbs up or down sign. Explain that having asthma can feel like breathing through a pinched straw. Be aware of children’s breathing during this demonstration, especially children with asthma.

Environmental triggers. Talk about common asthma triggers at home, at school, and outside (see previous page). Try these discussion starters:

- Pets with fur or feathers can cause asthma attacks. What are some pets that might be better choices for a kid with asthma?
- Imagine that your friend has asthma. You love playing together after school, but being around your dog makes your friend start to wheeze. How could you and your friend solve this problem?
- Imagine that chalk dust bothers some of your classmates with asthma. How could you make the classroom a healthier place for them?
- What things collect dust in a bedroom? (rugs, stuffed animals, blankets, etc.) How can Buster’s mom help reduce the dust in his bedroom?

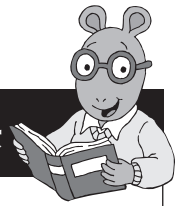


Family Activity. Discuss the pictures in the “Stay Active with Asthma! Family Activity” (included). Ask: *Which toy is the safer choice for someone with asthma, a plastic car or a teddy bear? Why?* Let children take the maze home to share with their families.

Helping out. List things a child should do during an asthma episode: stop, sit down, relax, take quick-relief medication (if prescribed by the child’s physician), tell a friend or adult. Ask students: *How can you help when a friend has an asthma attack?*

Reflect and draw. Have children draw pictures and write or dictate sentences about something they learned about asthma, how it feels to have asthma, or ways to make the school more trigger-free.

Read All About It



ABC’s of Asthma by Kim Gosselin.
See also *Taking Asthma to School* by the same author

Brianna Breathes Easy: A Story About Asthma by Virginia Kroll

Why Is It So Hard to Breathe? by Pat Thomas

Buster’s Breathless

Will Buster’s friends ever treat him the same after they learn that he has asthma? Watch the episode at pbskids.org/arthur/health to find out.



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