“CALL IT ASTHMA?”

Can you imagine breathing through a straw continuously & feeling like you can’t get your air out? That’s just what an asthma attack feels like; it’s a scary experience! May 3, 2016 has been recognized as World Asthma Day this year. The purpose of World Asthma Day is to help raise asthma awareness, improve asthma care, and support those who live with asthma. Support extends to family, caregivers, and even friends. Asthma is a lung condition where a person experiences airway narrowing or constriction, increased mucous production, and chronic airway inflammation. It is not curable; asthma is controllable with proper medical treatment. With the right combination of awareness, knowledge and treatment, most people can live a regular active life without significant limitations.

**Diagnosis:** Asthma diagnosis includes a variety of techniques and tests. Asthma screening includes a detailed history with reporting of signs and symptoms, lung function studies, physician assessment, lab testing, and a chest xray. Proper diagnosis will provide direction for adequate asthma control. A person put on an inhaler for a cough during a respiratory infection does not constitute an asthma diagnosis. A diagnosis involves a history of long standing symptoms and proper testing.

**Treatment:** Treatment guidelines are available from your healthcare professional to provide you an individualized high quality treatment plan. Inhaled anti-inflammatory medications are the treatment of choice for long-term asthma control. Inhaled bronchodilators help relieve immediate signs and symptoms of asthma, including shortness of breath. Asthma medications should always be by prescription or physician recommendation to provide the most effective and safest treatment plan.

**Education:** Proper use and knowledge of asthma medications is one of the key factors in controlling symptoms. Education needs to involve health care professionals including a physician and respiratory therapist, individuals with asthma, family members, daycare providers, friends, and school faculty. Improper use of medications can limit benefits and can even be detrimental to a person’s overall health. A spacer device (such as a tube extension placed on the mouthpiece of an inhaler) helps improve medication administration in the lungs. If you don’t know what this is, be sure and ask your healthcare professional if you should be using one. Understanding asthma and the treatment options for this disease is critically important to the long term success of symptom management.

**Environmental health:** People with asthma are particularly sensitive to environmental allergens. Allergens are environmental organisms or nonliving things that can “trigger” an asthma attack. Some examples include dust, pollen, air pollution, cigarette smoke, or chemicals. They can induce asthma symptoms and produce an asthma attack which can require immediate medical attention. Asthma episode “triggers” should be avoided as much as possible. Relaxation techniques are very beneficial to individuals who suffer from shortness of breath and asthma; stress can be a trigger. Understanding what triggers an asthma attack is just as important as knowing how to treat asthma.

Education, diagnosis, and treatment are key components of asthma control. Each one of these aspects needs to be integrated into every step of asthma care. Remember, asthma is the diagnosis a person has but it does not have to limit how an individual lives. Asthma will be controlled with proper medical treatment. At SCMC, our caring team is ready to help you breathe easier 24/7. We collaboratively work with local healthcare providers and specialty referring physicians from metro facilities to keep YOU close to home and help control your asthma. If you have further questions, please contact Kristie Davis, Registered Respiratory Therapist at 320-589-7670 in the Stevens Community Medical Center Respiratory Therapy Department.

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