

# Wheezing or noisy breathing

Most wheezing or noisy breathing happens when bub breathes out, air moving through narrow or tight airways in the lungs, makes a whistling sound.

## What can cause narrow airways?

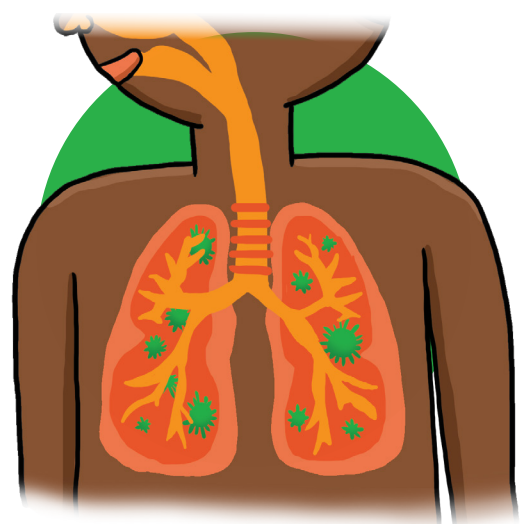
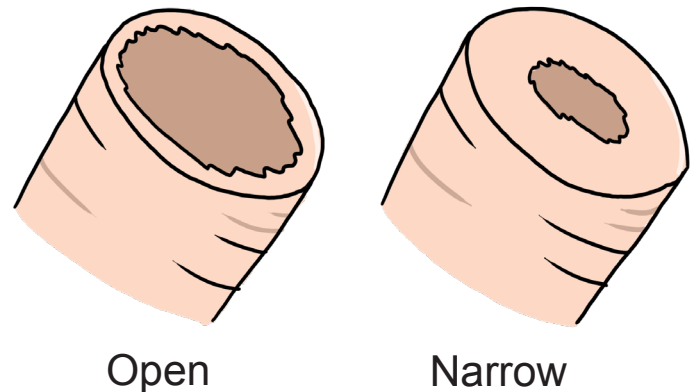
- **Viral chest infections** the airways swell and flem/spit build up. These viruses are more common in the cold weather.
- **Cigarette smoke** irritates bub's lungs and may lead to asthma. Have a smoke free house and car.
- **Asthma** makes airways extra sensitive or "twitchy" to triggers like dust, smoke, and pets. Be aware of bub's triggers and have medication on hand.
- Bub is born with **immature or floppy airways** and usually outgrows these by 3 to 4 years of age. Normal active or excitement can trigger wheezing, asthma medication doesn't help.

## See a doctor

The doctor will yarn to you about the families' medical background. This helps to work out what might be the cause, if it's:

### A chest infection

- Antibiotics don't work on viral infections; it will go away by itself. **Rest is best.**
- Antibiotics may help bacterial infection.
- If bub's over 12 to 18 months, asthma medication may help.
- Oxygen may help bub breathe if they have a bad chest infection. Oxygen may be given through a face mask or a thin tube that sits just inside the nose.



### Asthma

- A "reliever" medication, like salbutamol may help. Use a puffer, spacer and mask to help make sure the medication gets into bub's lungs.
- Use a nebuliser if it's a severe attack.
- A steroid in a syrup or tablet form may be given to bub to reduce swelling in the airways. It needs to be taken over 3 to 5 days.
- A prescription of steroid will be given to you before discharge from hospital. Follow instructions on the packet.
- If bub was given salbutamol in hospital, you will get a salbutamol puffer, spacer (and a mask if needed) to give bub at home until they feel better.
- The nurse will show you how to use the puffer with a spacer and mask if bub is under 3 years old.

## Know the signs when bub is having breathing trouble

### No difficulty breathing:

- can play without becoming short of breath
- doesn't cough or wheeze.

No medication needed.

### Signs of a cold or flu:

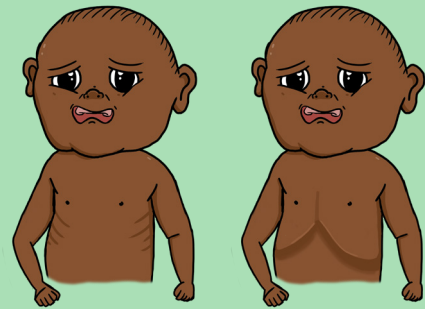
- wheezing or breathing trouble.

Give salbutamol inhaler 2 to 6 puffs, every 3 to 4 hours as needed and watch them.



### Working harder to breathe:

- breathing harder or faster than normal
- has an ongoing cough
- sucking in at the base of the neck, below the breastbone or in between the ribs
- bub's tummy pulling in and out hard as they breathe and wheeze.



Give bub 6 puffs of salbutamol as needed and see a GP or health clinic or go to the hospital as soon as possible.

### Call an ambulance 000 if bub is:

- blue at the lips
- can't say more than a few words at a time because they are so breathless
- so tired they look like they are going to stop breathing
- breathing very fast, cannot be comforted, are restless or having trouble feeding because of shortness of breath (baby).

If you or bub is frightened by what is happening.

While waiting for the ambulance, give bub their salbutamol puffer with their spacer - 4 puffs every 4 minutes until the ambulance arrives.



## Follow up

Take bub to see your GP or health clinic within a week of going home, they will:

- check to see if bub is doing better
- check how much longer bub will need to continue treatment
- let you know when to come back for bub's follow up again.



Government of Western Australia  
Child and Adolescent Health Service

### Child and Adolescent Health Service

15 Hospital Avenue, Nedlands, WA, 6009.

Telephone: (08) 6456 2222

Produced by: General Paediatrics Department / Social Work

Ref: 211.1 © CAHS 2021

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

**Disclaimer:** This publication is for general education and information purposes. Contact a qualified healthcare professional for any medical advice needed.

© State of Western Australia, Child and Adolescent Health Service.