



# Hypoxia and Hypoxemia



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When your body doesn't have enough oxygen, you could get **hypoxemia** or **hypoxia**. These are dangerous conditions. Without oxygen, your **brain**, **liver**, and other organs can be damaged just minutes after symptoms start.

### IN THIS ARTICLE

- Symptoms
- How It's Treated
- Causes of Hypoxia
- Preventing Hypoxia

Hypoxemia (low oxygen in your **blood**) can cause hypoxia (low oxygen in your tissues) when your **blood** doesn't carry enough oxygen to your tissues to meet your body's needs. The word hypoxia is sometimes used to describe both problems.

### Symptoms

Although they can vary from person to person, the most common hypoxia symptoms are:

- Changes in the color of your **skin**, ranging from blue to cherry red
- Confusion
- Cough
- Fast heart rate
- Rapid breathing
- Shortness of breath
- Slow heart rate
- Sweating
- Wheezing

If you have symptoms of hypoxia, call 911.

### How It's Treated

You'll need to go to the hospital to get treatment for hypoxia and to keep a check on your oxygen level.

The most important thing is to get more oxygen into your body. You'll receive it through a small plug in your nose or through a mask that covers your nose and **mouth**. For many people, this is enough to bring your oxygen level up to normal.



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An inhaler or **asthma medicine** by **mouth** may make breathing easier. If these don't help, the doctor might try giving you medicine through a vein in your arm (an IV). You might need **steroid** drugs for a short time to shrink **inflammation** in your **lungs** or antibiotics to treat an underlying infection.

When your life is in danger and other treatments aren't working, you may need a machine to help you breathe.

### Causes of Hypoxia

A **severe asthma attack**, or flare, can cause hypoxia in adults and kids. During an attack, your airways narrow, making it hard to get air into your **lungs**. **Coughing** to clear your lungs uses even more oxygen and can make symptoms worse.

Hypoxia can also result from lung damage due to trauma.

Other things can cause hypoxia include:

- Lung diseases** such as **chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)**, **emphysema**, **bronchitis**, pneumonia, and **pulmonary edema** (fluid in the lungs)
- Strong pain medicines and other drugs that hold back breathing
- Heart problems**
- Anemia** (a low number of red blood cells, which carry oxygen)
- Cyanide poisoning (Cyanide is a chemical used to make plastics and other products.)

### Preventing Hypoxia

The best way to prevent hypoxia is to keep your **asthma** under control, every day. Stick with your **asthma treatment plan**.

- Take your medicine to help prevent flares and the need to use your rescue inhaler.
- Eat right and stay active.
- Know your **asthma triggers**, and find ways to avoid them.

Work with your doctor to come up with an action plan for **asthma attacks**, so you know what to do when you have **trouble breathing**.

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