

Information and Support Help Sakhalin Woman Manage Asthma

For 43-year-old Irina Mogilyova, asthma is something she's had to live with for nearly half her life. "As a child, I never exhibited symptoms of asthma. It wasn't until I came down with pneumonia in my early twenties that I started to experience breathing problems," she explains. "After that, it seemed like every spring and autumn—sometimes even in the middle of winter—I would have difficulty catching my breath and a terrible tightness in my chest. This would go on for several days or even weeks before it would abate. The doctors I went to back then told me I had 'chronic bronchitis with asthma components' and gave me some medications that helped very little, if at all."

So, with her asthma by and large undiagnosed, Mogilyova suffered through the seasons, often missing days or weeks of work. Her condition also made it difficult to care for her son, who was 4 years old when she first started having problems breathing. "I really couldn't do much of anything during these attacks. I just had to stay at home resting, waiting for the symptoms to go away. Even a small amount of physical exertion would trigger an attack during these periods. After that, I knew that I would be okay for about six months or so before another bout," she says.

Usually when Mogilyova was in the midst of an attack, a doctor would come to her house to check on her and provide care. On several occasions, however, she was hospitalized because the symptoms were so severe. It was during a stay at Korsakov Rayon Hospital that she first encountered Natalya Kravtchenko, a primary care doctor who helped establish an Asthma Care Program at the affiliated polyclinic.

"It was pure luck that Natalya was my physician during that stay because not only did she provide effective care while I was hospitalized, she also told me that I did indeed have asthma and explained what I could do to manage it," Mogilyova recalls. "She taught me how to use an inhaler. I didn't know anything about this form of therapy then because I was always given injections and antibiotics. She also explained in great detail what asthma is and how I can make small



PHOTO: SUZANNE E. GRINNAN

Asthma patient Irina Mogilyova learned how to manage her condition thanks to Korsakov Hospital's Asthma Care Program.

lifestyle changes that can help prevent an attack," Mogilyova continues, pointing out that Kravtchenko was available, whether in person or over the phone, to answer any questions she had.

Learning how to manage her condition has made a world of difference, Mogilyova professes, noting, "It's so much more convenient to be able to use my inhaler at the first sign of an attack rather than having to always worry about whether I'd be able to get to the clinic or contact a doctor fast enough if I encountered difficulties breathing." The number of times she uses the inhaler depends on the season of the year and severity of her symptoms, Mogilyova says. "In autumn, I have to use it six times a day to prevent attacks, but then during the winter I can go days or even weeks without having to use it once. Because of my sessions with Natalya and the materials she gives me to read, I have learned what triggers my asthma and even the physical responses my body goes through when I am exposed to those triggers."

Living with a chronic disease can be a huge challenge for many people, especially if they don't understand their ailment or know what they can do to effectively manage it. For people living with asthma, the fear of what can trigger an acute attack—a dusty stack of books, a brisk walk to the corner store, a playful pet, or even a summer breeze—is ever-present. Instruction about clinical interventions, self-administered therapies, and preventive measures can make a world of difference in quality of life for asthma patients. This is the story of one Russian woman who turned to primary care specialists at the Korsakov Rayon Hospital and Polyclinic for help managing her asthma. The story of the physician who helped her appears on the other side.

Because Mogilyova also has high blood pressure, Dr. Kravtchenko worked closely with her to develop an approach that addresses both conditions. "When I am stressed or I overexert myself, this can prompt an asthma attack. Not being able to breathe properly then causes my blood pressure to go up. It is like each condition feeds off the other, so I have to manage both at the same time. Thanks to Natalya, I have been able to do it," Mogilyova says with gratitude.

"I guess I got used to the limitations I had to live with for so long because of my asthma," Mogilyova admits. "I couldn't go out with my friends after work, for example, or I had to have help taking care of my son. I would miss a lot of work, too, during certain months. Now, though, I haven't had to be hospitalized in quite some time and I am much more confident that I can handle things when I feel an attack coming on. I'm so happy that Natalya and the other physicians at the polyclinic are available to give me information and advice. I really believe that learning more about what asthma is—and how I can control it—has made a positive difference in my life."



For more information on AIHA, visit www.aiha.com