The Asthma History

Presenting Signs and Symptoms:
- Wheeze
- Chest tightness
- Shortness of breath
- Rapid breathing
- Dry or productive cough

Especially characteristic if the symptoms are
- Recurrent
- Worse at night or early morning
- Obviously triggered by exercise, irritants, allergens or viral infection.

Severe asthma may present with
- Appearance of exhaustion and fear
- Inability to speak
- Lethargy due to hypercapnea
- Obvious cyanosis (red flag!)
- Palpitations due to tachycardia

What to look for in the history:
- Current symptoms:
  - severity
  - exercise limitation?
  - Sleep disturbance? How often do they wake up at night?)
- duration
- aggravating factors-
  - ALLERGY? Is there ECZEMA? Very important
  - Allergic rhinitis? Hay fever?

?Current medications unrelated to asthma?-beta-blockers or aspirin?
- Pattern of symptoms (chronology of the illness over days/weeks)
- Quality of Cough and any sputum thus produced
- Present management and its perceived effect
  eg, how often is the puffer used,
  how many puffs are needed,
  how long does a puffer last,
  how it is used (properly?), etc
- Previous hospitalisation
  (due to a chest complaint? Allergic reaction? ICU stay?)
- Home and work environment
  - ?dust, pollen, pets, chemicals?
  - Are they a florist or veterinarian?
  - Current smoker or lives with smokers?
  - Do the symptoms improve on the weekends? )
- Impact of disease on lifestyle
  - including ADLs, eg. cooking, cleaning, shopping, transport; as well as recreational activities, and work duties
  - –i.e how much work/school is missed due to asthma
- Family history of atopy- rashes, asthma, anaphylaxis?

Grading of Dyspnoea:
- I = on heavy exertion
- II = moderate exertion
- III = minimal exertion
- IV = at rest