
Preface

Asthma has rapidly become one of the most common chronic illnesses of the Western world, and its prevalence continues to rise, with the proportion of patients with more severe diseases also increasing. Faced with this problem, more researchers are focusing on the causes, mechanisms, and pathophysiology of asthma. The major hopes are that more effective drugs will become available and that preventive measures can be instituted. Increasingly, molecular and cell biology approaches are being used to characterize and understand the mechanisms of the inflammatory process that is typical of the asthmatic airway. This volume on *Asthma: Mechanisms and Protocols* in the *Methods in Molecular Medicine* series provides an overview of the molecular mechanisms involved in asthma by providing extensive protocols that are being used in asthma research. Briefly, it covers details of methods for obtaining cells from the airways, analysis of gene and protein expression in the limited clinical samples from asthmatic airways, use of molecular and cellular tools for studying cytokine expression and release, studies of asthma-related genes and genetic polymorphisms, and understanding the effects of asthma treatments. With such coverage, the volume ties in several disciplines, including allergy and immunology, cell biology, pharmacology, and histology. We have continued in the spirit of the series to provide a bench book for day-to-day use. We hope that those who have little or no experience in the field of asthma research will find the book a useful starting point, and eventually come to use the volume on a daily basis. This volume would not have been possible without the contribution of all those excellent investigators who took time away from their bench to write about their methods. We thank them.

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