Asthma Australia

This brochure has been developed for the community by Asthma Australia.

It provides basic facts about:

— What is asthma and how do you recognise it?
— Who gets asthma and why?
— How do people with asthma keep safe and well?
— How can you help someone with asthma?

To find out more about asthma contact your local Asthma Foundation:

1800 645 130 (office hours)
asthmaaustralia.org.au

Translating and Interpreting Service: 131 450

Ask them to telephone your local Asthma Foundation on 1800 645 130 (office hours)

All Asthma Australia information is endorsed by our Medical and Scientific Advisory Committee and is consistent with the National Asthma Council Australia clinical guidelines.

Asthma Australia information does not replace professional medical advice. People should ask their doctor any questions about diagnosis and treatment.

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Asthma Basic Facts

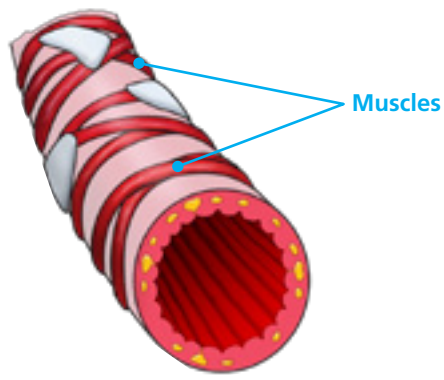
How people with asthma can stay safe and well

Asthma Australia

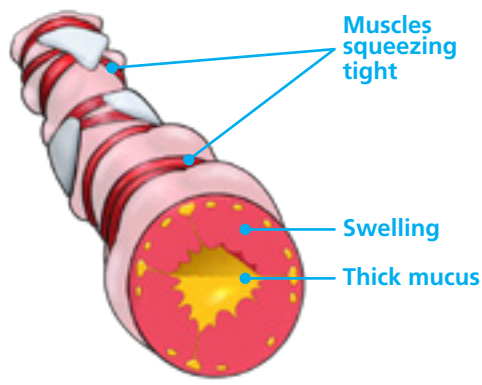
What is asthma?

Asthma is a condition of the airways. People with asthma have sensitive airways which react to triggers that set off their asthma. Their airways swell and get thick with mucus and the muscles around the airway squeeze tight. This makes it hard to breathe.

Normal Airway



Asthma Airway



How do you recognise asthma?

People with asthma can have a range of symptoms:

— Breathlessness
— Wheezing
— Tight chest
— Persistent cough – often at night, early in the morning or during/after activity.

Who gets asthma and why?

Asthma affects people of all ages. Some people get asthma when they are young; others when they are older. The causes are not fully understood, although people with asthma often have a family history of asthma, eczema and hayfever (allergic rhinitis). There is some evidence that exposure to environmental factors such as workplace chemicals or tobacco smoke can lead to asthma.

Researchers continue to try to find out more about what causes asthma and how we might prevent it.

How do people with asthma keep safe and well?

While we still need to find out more about what causes asthma, we do know a lot about how to live well with asthma. Most people can carry out their lives normally, by following simple asthma treatments.

Your local Asthma Foundation has a wide range of information and courses.

You can:

— Learn about asthma and asthma first aid
— Learn about your asthma symptoms, triggers and medication.

How do your symptoms help you understand your asthma?

Everyone's asthma is different and can change over time: that's why it's important for people with asthma to see their doctor at least twice a year for an asthma checkup and more frequently if they have concerns.

If you have asthma, see your doctor if you:

— Wake up coughing, wheezing or breathless
— Struggle to keep up with normal activity
— Use your reliever more than three times a week
— Are unsure about the way your medications can work best for you.

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Do you know your triggers?

Not every person has the same triggers.
Common asthma triggers include:

— Colds and flu
— Inhaled allergens, for example pollens, moulds, animal dander, dust mite
— Smoke for example from cigarettes or fire
— Activity and exercise
— Workplace chemicals
— Dust and pollution
— Changes in temperature and weather
— Emotions, for example laughter or stress
— Work place environment.

Get an asthma action plan from your doctor

An asthma plan tells you how to:

— Respond to your asthma symptoms
— Use your medication
— Know when to seek medical help.

Know how your medications work for you

There is a wide range of asthma medications.
The two most common are shown here:

Reliever	Blue/Grey colour
What it does	Relaxes tight airways for up to 4 hours
How it works	Very quickly – in about 4 minutes
When to take it	— When you have symptoms — Emergency — Before exercise as prescribed
Helpful to know	Carry it with you always in case of symptoms

Preventer	Autumn/Desert colour
What it does	— Soothes airways — Less swelling — Dries up mucus
How it works	Slowly – days
When to take it	Every day as prescribed – even if you feel well
Helpful to know	The key to keeping well with asthma

If you would like further information on the full range of asthma medications and the different devices used to take these medications, please refer to Asthma Australia's medication and devices brochure.

How can you help someone with asthma?

Even when people look after their asthma well every day, an asthma attack can happen. Signs of an asthma attack can include:

Mild

— Cough
— Minor difficulty breathing
— No difficulty speaking in sentences

Moderate

— Persistent cough
— Obvious difficulty breathing
— Able to speak in short sentences only

Severe & life threatening

— Gasping for breath
— Pale and sweaty
— May have blue lips
— Speaks only a few words in one breath

Asthma can get worse quickly – or slowly over a longer period of time – even a few days. Asthma first aid can be provided as soon as you notice asthma worsening.

Do not wait until asthma is severe to start asthma first aid.

Everyone can learn asthma first aid.

Helpful information for Asthma First Aid

If a person's asthma suddenly gets worse:

If a person's asthma suddenly gets worse or you are concerned, call for emergency assistance (Dial 000) immediately.
Tell the operator a person is having an asthma attack.

If you are in a remote area:

In remote areas, after dialing for emergency assistance, seek medical advice as available, for example, a local community nurse or health clinic.

If you don't know the person has asthma:

If a person is finding it hard to breathe and you do not know if they have asthma or not, call emergency assistance (Dial 000) immediately and then follow the Asthma First Aid Plan.

Giving blue reliever medication to someone who does not have asthma is unlikely to harm them.

Asthma First Aid

1 Sit the person upright

— Be calm and reassuring
— Do not leave them alone

2 Give medication

— Shake the blue reliever puffer*
— Use a spacer if you have one
— **Give 4 separate puffs into the spacer**
— **Take 4 breaths from the spacer after each puff**

*You can use a Bricanyl Turbuhaler if you do not have access to a puffer and spacer

Giving blue reliever medication to someone who doesn't have asthma is unlikely to harm them

3 Wait 4 minutes

— **If there is no improvement, repeat step 2**

4 If there is still no improvement call emergency assistance (DIAL 000)

— Tell the operator the person is having an asthma attack
— Keep giving 4 puffs every 4 minutes while you wait for emergency assistance

Call emergency assistance immediately (DIAL 000) if the person's asthma suddenly becomes worse

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