

Asthma and smoking

People with asthma have sensitive airways inside their lungs. Certain 'triggers' can make these airways narrow. If you have asthma, smoking can lead to more asthma symptoms, more frequent asthma attacks, worse asthma control and less benefit from some asthma medications. Smoking also damages your airways, leading to inflammation and faster loss of lung function. Stopping smoking may reduce asthma symptoms and use of asthma medication within a few months.

Damage to the airways

Your lungs are lined by tiny hairs called cilia. These move in a wave-like motion to sweep dust, pollens and other irritants out of your lungs. Cigarette smoke damages these tiny hairs. This means your lungs will be less able to clean themselves, which can lead to mucus and toxic substances collecting in the lungs, increasing the risk of lung disease. Smoking can also damage the small airways and air sacs within the lung, causing emphysema.

Passive smoking

Breathing in other people's cigarette smoke can also be harmful to a person with asthma, especially children. Second-hand cigarette smoke can:

- Trigger an asthma attack
- Increase the frequency of asthma attacks
- Increase your need for asthma medication
- Make your airways more sensitive to other triggers like pollen
- Reduce your lung function.

Pregnant women who smoke

If a woman smokes when she is pregnant, the chemicals in the cigarette smoke are passed to the developing baby through the umbilical cord. The baby's lungs can be affected, which increases the baby's risk of developing wheezing symptoms early in life. Smoking during pregnancy also causes many other problems, such as low birth weight and premature labour, and increases the risk of fetal death and stillbirth.

Smoking around children

Children exposed to second-hand smoke are more likely to develop asthma in childhood. Children with asthma who live in a smoky environment have more severe symptoms, suffer more frequent asthma attacks and are more likely to use asthma medications. Children of smokers are more likely to develop chest infections and other illnesses. Repeated chest infections in infancy may be an indicator of an increased likelihood of developing asthma.

In Victoria, it is illegal to smoke in cars carrying children under 18 years of age.

Reducing the risk

You can reduce the risk of worsening your asthma by avoiding cigarette smoke. Some suggestions include:

- Quit smoking.
- Make your home smoke free – ask guests not to smoke in your house.
- Avoid smoky places, like semi-outdoor areas of pubs and bars.

- Choose smoke-free venues when going out, such as restaurants, cafes, cinemas and smoke free dance parties and gigs.

When smoky places are unavoidable

If you can't always keep away from smoky places, it is important to manage your asthma on a daily basis. If you need to take your reliever medication more than three or four times a week (excluding 'before exercise' medication), you should visit your doctor. Your asthma management plan might need to be adjusted. Remember to take your reliever medication with you when you visit a smoky place.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your local pharmacy
- Asthma Victoria Tel. (03) 9326 7088
- Quitline Tel. 13 7848 (13 QUIT)

Things to remember

- Second-hand smoke is a trigger for people with asthma.
- Smokers with asthma have worse asthma control and faster loss of lung function.
- Women who smoke during pregnancy are harming the development of their baby's lungs.
- If you have asthma, avoid smoky places whenever possible.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Quit

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