

Asthma and teenagers

Asthma affects about one in seven teenagers. By understanding and managing your asthma, you can keep it under control and stop it affecting your study, sport and social activities.

Coping with change

The teenage or adolescent years are a time of great physical and emotional change, and dealing with asthma may seem a low priority. Teenagers need the help and support of parents and family.

The importance of self-management

Teenagers can successfully and responsibly manage their own asthma through three simple steps:

1. If prescribed preventer or combination medications, take them regularly. They are the key to good asthma control.
2. Know your individual asthma trigger factors and avoid these where possible.
3. Know your Asthma Action Plan – recognise signs of worsening asthma and how to treat them.

How teenagers can help themselves

Some helpful hints for the teenager with asthma include:

- Take time to learn about asthma. Understand what your medication does and how to use your medication devices correctly.
- Visit your doctor every six months, or more often if you have severe asthma.
- Work with your doctor to develop an Asthma Action Plan.

Your Asthma Action Plan

An Asthma Action Plan is a written set of instructions prepared in partnership with your doctor that assists you to manage your asthma at different times. It will outline what medication to take every day when well, what to do when unwell and what to do when your asthma is worse.

Your plan should help you to:

- Recognise when your asthma symptoms are worsening or an 'attack' is developing.
- Start treatment quickly.
- Identify the symptoms that are serious enough to need urgent medical help.

Effects of medications

Some people are worried about the side effects of asthma medications. A number of the asthma preventer medications are corticosteroids. These 'steroids' are not the same as the anabolic steroids that can be misused by athletes. By inhaling medication, small doses can be taken and they go directly to the airways.

If using a preventer or combination medication it is important that you rinse, gargle and spit after each use and use a spacer morning and night. This will help reduce the chances of developing oral thrush, a change in your voice or a sore throat.

Exercise and sport

Exercise is important because it keeps you fit and healthy. However, exercise can sometimes trigger asthma. People with asthma should be able to play almost any sport or exercise (although scuba diving should be avoided).

These tips should be followed if you experience asthma symptoms when exercising or playing sport:

- Always warm up before exercise; 15 to 20 minutes of light exercise and stretching is recommended.
- Use your reliever medication 5 to 10 minutes before you warm up.
- Remember to carry your reliever medication at all times. It is the only medication to use in an asthma emergency.
- Always cool down after exercise.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your local community health centre
- The Asthma Foundation of Victoria Tel.1800 645 130 or (03) 9326 7088

Things to remember

- Having an Asthma Action Plan can help you manage your asthma.
- The steroids in asthma medication are safe and effective.

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

Asthma Foundation of Victoria

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