

Asthma and your workplace

There are many substances in the workplace that may cause asthma to develop in a previously health person or trigger asthma symptoms in someone who already has asthma. This is known as occupational asthma. Such substances may include sawdust or strong cleaning products.

Exposure may occur while you are performing a particular task or working in a particular area. Occupation asthma may be indicated by symptoms that:

- Vary during the working week or shift
- Occur at night, in the morning after significant exposure, or during the working day
- Improve over weekends or holidays.

High risk jobs

Some jobs are more likely to affect a person with asthma because of the triggers in the environment. These include:

- **Baking and pastry cooks** – flour, additives and sodium metabisulphate
- **Car repairs and panel beating** – epoxy resins and organic solvents
- **Electronics** – solder fumes
- **Farming** – animal fur, feathers and grain dust
- **Fire fighting** – smoke and combustion products
- **Foam manufacturers** – polyurethane
- **Garage attendants** – car exhaust fumes
- **Grain handling** – fumigants and grain dust
- **Hairdressing** – dyes, perfumes and sprays
- **Metal refining** – acids, chlorines, aluminium and heavy metal salts
- **Oil refining** – hydrocarbon mists
- **Painting and decorating** – paint additives and solvents
- **Printing** – dyes and solvents
- **Woodworking** – wood dust
- **Working with animals** – animal fur and animal urine.

Avoid exposure to triggers

Triggers cause inflammation or swelling in your airways and make your asthma worse. Reducing your exposure to things that trigger your asthma symptoms is a large part of taking control of your asthma. It could be dangerous to ignore your asthma symptoms and continue being exposed to triggers, as some triggers set off attacks suddenly.

Work with your employer to develop strategies to reduce your exposure to triggers. This might mean introducing safety practices at work, such as masks and respirators, or installing exhaust fans or air filtration units.

Early treatment is crucial

If you did not have asthma previously, and think you have developed asthma following exposure to substances in the workplace, it is important to seek medical advice. Your condition may improve by avoiding any further exposure.

Where to get help

- Your doctor

- Your pharmacist
- Your health and safety representative at work
- The Asthma Foundation of Victoria Tel. 1800 645 130 or (03) 9326 7088

Things to remember

- If your asthma symptoms are worse during the working week, you may have occupational asthma.
- It is important to avoid exposure to the triggers in your workplace.
- Work together with your employer to develop strategies to reduce your exposure to substances.

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

Asthma Foundation of Victoria

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