
Asthma and adults

Summary

- There are many people who experience asthma for the first time as an adult. Proper diagnosis is essential.
 - Medications will help to manage your asthma. Make sure to take them regularly and as prescribed.
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Many people think of asthma as a childhood illness, however, adults can also develop asthma. Approximately one in nine adults in Australia have asthma. Careful and proper diagnosis is important, as asthma symptoms can be confused with other conditions, such as heart disease or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (another respiratory condition). In many cases, adults with asthma may have had asthma or similar symptoms as children and it may have persisted throughout their life. However, there are also many people who experience asthma for the first time as an adult.

Symptoms of asthma in adults

Asthma symptoms may differ between people, but common symptoms are:

- breathlessness
- wheezing
- persistent cough, especially at night or early in the morning
- a feeling of tightness in the chest.

Asthma triggers in adults

Adults with asthma are sensitive to the same kinds of triggers that bring on asthma symptoms in younger people. Triggers can vary between people and you may have more than one trigger that sets off your asthma symptoms.

Triggers may include:

- allergens such as pollen or mould spores
- cigarette smoke
- dust and dust mites
- fumes and strong odours
- respiratory infections, such as a cough, cold or the flu
- some medications such as beta-blockers and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs
- exercise and physical activity
- pets
- in certain circumstances, thunderstorms.

Cigarette smoke and asthma

Cigarette smoke is a common trigger for asthma symptoms. Many other respiratory illnesses are caused and made worse by smoking, including emphysema and chronic bronchitis.

Managing symptoms will become easier for people with asthma if they are able to quit smoking or avoid being around people who are smoking.

Asthma medication is important

Generally, as we get older, our lungs become less and less efficient. However, developing asthma as an adult can speed up the deterioration of your lung function.

To maintain and improve your asthma control both in the short and long term, it is important to continue to take your **asthma medications** and discuss any symptoms and concerns with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Spacers for asthma medication

It is recommended that all people with asthma, regardless of age, use a spacer when taking medication via a metered-dose inhaler (puffer).

Spacers help to improve the delivery of asthma medication to the lungs and minimise side effects from medications. Talk to your pharmacist about spacers and how they might help you manage your asthma.

Good asthma control

If you have good asthma control:

- you are able to do all your usual activities
- you have no asthma symptoms during the night or on waking
- you have daytime symptoms no more than two days per week
- you need your reliever medication no more than two days per week
- any symptoms go away quickly after taking your reliever puffer.

If your asthma is affecting your day-to-day activities, or you are having symptoms or needing to use your reliever more often, see your doctor for a review of your asthma.

Asthma action plans

If you have asthma, make sure your doctor provides you with a personalised, written asthma action plan. This is a set of instructions written by your doctor that outlines:

- how to care for your asthma day-to-day, including what asthma medication to take
- how to tell if your asthma is getting worse
- what to do if your symptoms are getting worse
- what to do if you have an asthma attack
- the name of the person preparing the plan, and the date.

This plan should be reviewed every year, as your asthma will change over time.

Asthma and influenza

While adults with severe asthma are not more likely to get the flu than anyone else, a bout of influenza (flu virus) can be more serious for them, and longer lasting.

Adults with severe asthma should talk to their doctor about having yearly influenza immunisations and an asthma action plan to manage their asthma during this time.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your pharmacist
- The **Royal Children's Hospital** has produced a number of videos to help you better understand and manage your child's asthma.
- **Asthma Australia (Victoria)** Tel. 1800 ASTHMA (278 462)

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Asthma Australia

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