

No 1. What is Asthma?

Asthma is a common condition affecting the airways causing redness and inflammation (swelling). Because of this inflammation the airways are irritable and can narrow (constrict) in reaction to a wide range of “triggers”. This constriction or narrowing is usually reversible but in some patients with chronic asthma the inflammation may cause some permanent or irreversible narrowing.

The main symptoms of asthma are:-

- Coughing
- Wheezing
- Breathlessness
- A tight feeling round the chest

Not everybody will get all these symptoms and any of them may be caused by other conditions.

The most common “triggers” that bring on these symptoms are:-

- Colds/Flu/Chest Infections
- House Dust Mite
- Cigarette Smoke
- Animals
- Exercise
- Pollens or Moulds
- Excitement

Asthma often runs in families along with other allergic (atopic) conditions such as hayfever and eczema which are more common in people with asthma.

Childhood asthma is similar to adult asthma in many ways but young children sometimes react differently. Very young children may wheeze only when they have a cold and may not improve with the use of inhalers. Some of these young children will have less symptoms as they grow up while others will need continuing treatment.

Unfortunately there is no cure for asthma but there are many treatments available and, with the right treatment, most people can be free of symptoms and have no restriction of lifestyle.

Your doctor will prescribe medication for your asthma using nationally agreed guidance which uses a step-wise approach to ensure the best possible control of your symptoms on the smallest possible dose of medicine.

For treatment to be successful it is important that prescribed medications are taken as directed and that you let your doctor or nurse know if the treatment is working.

There are two main types of treatment:-

RELIEVERS - (Usually a blue device) which act within minutes to relieve symptoms by relaxing narrowed airways.

PREVENTERS – (Usually a brown, red or orange device) which must be taken regularly to be effective. Preventers reduce the inflammation of the airways.

Your doctor or nurse will explain clearly which of your treatments are relievers and preventers.

The most commonly used test in asthma management is the peak flow rate. Peak flow rate is a measure of how quickly you can blow air out of your lungs. If your airways are inflamed and narrowed your peak flow will be reduced. You and your doctor or nurse can use peak flow measurements to help see how well controlled your asthma is.

You may benefit from a self-management plan which your doctor or nurse will discuss with you. A self-management plan will advise you on certain actions to take if your peak flow is reduced and allow you to have more control of your asthma.

Occasionally, even when you take your treatments regularly, you may have an asthma attack. If you have a self-management plan, that will tell you what to do. If you do not have a self-management plan and you have an asthma attack:-

- **TAKE 2 PUFFS OF YOUR RELIEVER**
- **SIT DOWN FOR 5-10 MINUTES**

If your reliever does not ease your symptoms or if you are too breathless to talk comfortably you must **PHONE YOUR DOCTOR URGENTLY OR GO TO A HOSPITAL ACCIDENT AND EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT**. Call an ambulance if necessary.

Keep taking your reliever every few minutes until you get help.

Do not be afraid to make a fuss, even at night, if your attack seems severe.

If you have any queries about your asthma you should contact:-

We are happy to consider requests for this publication in other languages or formats such as large print.

Please call **01324 590886** (24hrs), or email fv.disabilitydepartment@nhs.scot

