

PATIENT INFORMATION

Information about Asthma

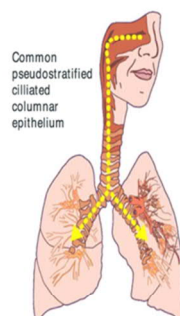
What is asthma?

Asthma is an intermittent narrowing of the medium sized airways in the lungs. In an asthma attack the muscles around the airways tighten, the lining of the airways swells, and increased mucus is produced within the airway. This may cause difficulty breathing, cough and wheeze. Individuals with asthma may have one, some or all these symptoms. To imagine what it is like having an asthma attack try breathing through a straw!

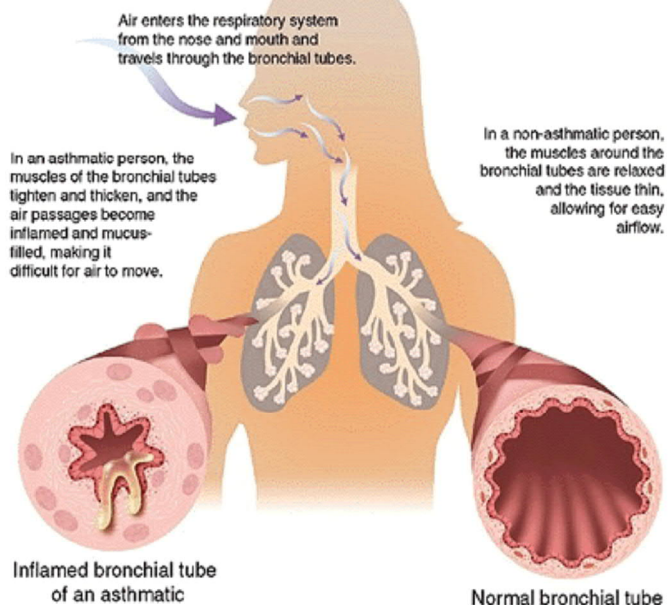
Possible asthma triggers include exercise, cold air, cigarette smoke and allergies such as pollen or dust mites. Avoiding these triggers may help to prevent symptoms.

- The upper and lower airways are connected:
- Therapeutically
- Treating the upper airway improves lower airway allergic asthma

Unified Airways



Why asthma makes it hard to breathe



Treatment

- Preventers work by reducing airway swelling and mucus production. They are usually steroid inhalers which are brown or orange and have different strengths. Sometimes a steroid is combined with a long acting reliever in a purple inhaler. These treatments are usually taken twice a day and are only effective if taken regularly. Some children and young people are given an oral medicine to be used instead of or as well as an inhaler.
- Relievers treat the symptoms once they have started by relaxing the muscles tightening around the airways. It is usually a blue inhaler containing salbutamol and works quickly but the effects wear off in a few hours.
- **Recommendations to treat your child's acute exacerbations are detailed in the Asthma Action Plan.**
- If your child needs to receive their relieving inhaler more than a few times per week then you should arrange review with their GP or paediatrician as a higher dose of preventer may be required.
A nurse, doctor or pharmacist should show you and your child how to use any inhalers prescribed.

Why is it important to treat asthma correctly?

- Asthma is usually fully reversible with proper treatment.
- Individuals whose asthma is well controlled are able to enjoy playing and exercise more and have less time off school and away from friends due to illness.
- A severe asthma attack can be life threatening.
- If asthma is not treated properly over a long period, then the narrowing of the airways can become irreversible, leading to persistent symptoms despite proper treatment.

For further information see

www.asthma.org.uk or www.patient.co.uk/health/asthma or talk to your doctor/nurse.

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.