

#asthma  
#publichealth5-19service



# ASTHMA FACTSHEET

This factsheet will provide you with information about asthma and links to helpful websites.

## FACTS ABOUT ASTHMA:

### What is asthma?

Asthma is a swelling and narrowing of the airway, this causes difficulty in breathing and can be relieved by medication. It can affect 1 in 7 children and young people.

### Controlling your asthma

Too many people with asthma spend time in hospital when they shouldn't have to: 75% of hospital admissions could be avoided.

If your asthma is under control, you're more likely to have a better quality of life and be more able to do the things you want to.

### Is your asthma under control?

Three questions can help you to decide whether your symptoms are under control:

In the last month:

- Have you had difficulty sleeping because of your asthma symptoms (including cough)?
- Have you had your usual asthma symptoms during the day (cough, wheeze, chest tightness or breathlessness)?
- Has your asthma interfered with your usual activities - e.g. sport, school etc?

If you've answered 'yes' to any of the above questions, it may be that your asthma is not as well controlled as it could be. See your doctor or asthma nurse to discuss how you may be able to improve your asthma control.

Signs that your asthma is not well controlled may include:

- Waking at night with coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath or a tightness in the chest.
- Having to take time off school because of your asthma.
- Finding it difficult to breathe, and breathing short breaths.
- Needing more and more of your reliever.
- Finding that your reliever does not seem to be working.
- Having to take your reliever more than every four hours.

### How to recognise and what to do if you are having an asthma attack:

- Your reliever inhaler does not help.
- Your symptoms are getting worse (cough, breathlessness, wheeze or tight chest).
- You are too breathless to speak, eat or sleep.

Do not be afraid of causing a fuss, even at night. If you go to A&E (accident and emergency) or are admitted to hospital, take details of your medicines with you if possible.

The following guidelines are suitable and are the recommended steps to follow in an asthma attack:

- Take one to two puffs of your reliever inhaler (usually blue), immediately.
- Sit down and try to take slow, steady breaths.
- If you do not start to feel better, take two puffs of your reliever inhaler (one puff at a time) every two minutes. You can take up to ten puffs.
- If you do not feel better after taking your inhaler as above, or if you are worried at any time, call 999.
- If an ambulance does not arrive within 10 minutes and you are still feeling unwell, repeat step 3.
- If your symptoms improve and you do not need to call 999, you still need to see a doctor or asthma nurse within 24 hours

### **“I hate using my inhaler when my mates are watching, I just want to play footie”**

With the right support there is no reason why you should be treated any differently from your friends. We are here to ensure you get the right support and plan of care to allow this.

Tips to help young people with asthma exercise safely:

- Make sure your teacher/instructor knows you have asthma.
- Increase your fitness levels gradually.
- Always have your reliever inhaler with you when you exercise.
- If exercise triggers your asthma use your reliever inhaler immediately before you warm up.
- Ensure that you always warm up and warm down.
- Try not to come in contact with things that trigger your asthma.
- If you have asthma symptoms when you exercise, stop, take your reliever inhaler and wait five minutes before starting again.
- If you use preventer medicine, take it as prescribed by your doctor or nurse.

There is evidence that has found young people with asthma are more likely to smoke than young people who don't. Smoking will not help you maintain a healthy, active life like your friends, we strongly recommend you not to start smoking. Support is available from Cumbria's stop smoking service by calling 0300 013 3000 or from your local pharmacy or [www.nhs.uk/smokefree](http://www.nhs.uk/smokefree)

### **Seasonal flu vaccine**

We know that colds and flu are triggers for around 90% of people with asthma and that if they catch viruses during the colder months their asthma can get much worse. This can result in periods of prolonged illness or even hospital admissions. Although it's not always possible to avoid common cold viruses, having the flu vaccine can protect against some of the flu viruses that are expected in the UK during the winter. You can access your flu vaccination from your doctor.

## **VISIT THESE USEFUL WEBSITES:**

[www.beatasthma.co.uk/](http://www.beatasthma.co.uk/)

Website with lots of information and resources for parents, schools and young people.

[www.asthma.org.uk](http://www.asthma.org.uk)

Website with excellent resources. We would like to acknowledge them for their support in providing this information.