



Common questions about asthma

This resource provides answers to some common questions about asthma.

Understanding asthma

What is asthma?

Asthma is a long-term lung condition that affects the lungs. It can occur at any age. People with asthma have sensitive airways that can react to triggers such as colds and viruses, smoke, pollen or exercise. During a flare-up the muscles around the airways squeeze tight and the inside of the airways become inflamed. This causes them to swell, become narrow and produce more mucus. These things make it harder to breathe.

Is asthma a serious health condition?

Asthma can be mild, moderate or severe. In Australia more than 400 people die from asthma each year. There is no cure for asthma, but with the right treatment and support, most people living with asthma can live full and active lives.

Do children grow out of asthma?

Asthma is a long-term condition, but symptoms may improve as children get older. Flare-ups may become less frequent or severe. Some children, especially during their teenage years, may have long periods without symptoms. However, asthma can return later in life. In very young children, improvement is often linked to growth and development, such as larger airways and stronger lungs.

Can adults develop asthma?

Yes. Asthma can develop for the first time in adulthood. This is called adult-onset asthma. It may be triggered by allergens, irritants, hormonal change, stress, emotions, viral infections or exposure to substances in the workplace. For more information, see the resource '*Adult onset asthma*'.



Symptoms and flare-ups

How can I tell if my asthma is getting worse?

Asthma can worsen gradually over days or weeks, or suddenly within minutes. Early signs are different for everyone but may include:

- Feeling more tired than usual
- Needing your reliever inhaler more often
- Waking at night
- More coughing, wheezing or shortness of breath
- Chest tightness
- Symptoms most mornings

Knowing your early warning signs helps you act quickly. If your symptoms worsen, follow your Asthma Action Plan and seek medical help.

Can hay fever make asthma worse?

Hay fever (allergic rhinitis) can trigger or worsen asthma. It occurs when the nose and eyes react to allergens like pollen, dust mites, mould, or animal dander. This inflammation can affect the airways and cause coughing or wheezing.

People with both asthma and hay fever may also have a higher risk of thunderstorm asthma. Speak with your doctor or pharmacist about treatments that suit you.

Is exercise safe for people with asthma?

Yes. Exercise is important and should not usually be avoided. With a proper warm-up and if needed, pre-exercise medication, most people with asthma can safely take part in regular physical activity. Being active improves fitness, overall health and can help with asthma management.

Medications and treatment

Is a reliever all I need to manage my asthma?

No. Reliever inhalers provide quick relief from symptoms and should always be carried with you. However, many people also need a preventer inhaler to reduce airway inflammation and help prevent symptoms and flare-ups.

Good asthma management includes:

- A personalised Asthma Action Plan

- Regular reviews with your doctor
- Avoiding triggers where possible
- Staying active and maintaining a healthy lifestyle
- Not smoking
- Annual vaccinations

How often can I use my reliever inhaler?

Your reliever inhaler is used for quick relief during symptoms during a flare-up. If you need it more than twice a week, speak with your doctor or healthcare team. This may indicate your asthma is not well controlled and your treatment plan needs review.

Can using too much reliever inhaler be harmful?

Your reliever inhaler is used for quick relief during symptoms during a flare-up. If you need it more than twice a week, speak with your doctor or healthcare team. This may indicate your asthma is not well controlled and your treatment plan needs review.



Do I need to take my preventer medication every day?

Yes. Preventer medicines should be taken daily as prescribed, even when you feel well. It may take 2–4 weeks of regular use for the medicine to reach its full effect. If you aren't using a preventer, speak with your doctor at your next asthma review about whether it could be suitable for you.

Should I keep taking my asthma medicines if I am pregnant?

Yes. Good asthma control during pregnancy helps protect both you and your baby. Taking your prescribed medicines, especially preventers, is safer than stopping them. Asthma flare-ups can reduce oxygen supply to your baby. Speak with your doctor to review your medications and create a

pregnancy-specific Asthma Action Plan.

Are inhaled steroids safe?

Inhaled corticosteroids (also called inhaled steroids) are a key treatment for asthma. They deliver medicine directly to the lungs to reduce inflammation. When used as prescribed, they are safe and do not cause dependence. They do not cure asthma, but they help to control symptoms and prevent flare-ups.

A common side effect of inhaled corticosteroids is oral thrush, a fungal infection in the mouth. This can usually be prevented by:

- Rinsing your mouth with water or brushing your teeth after using your inhaler

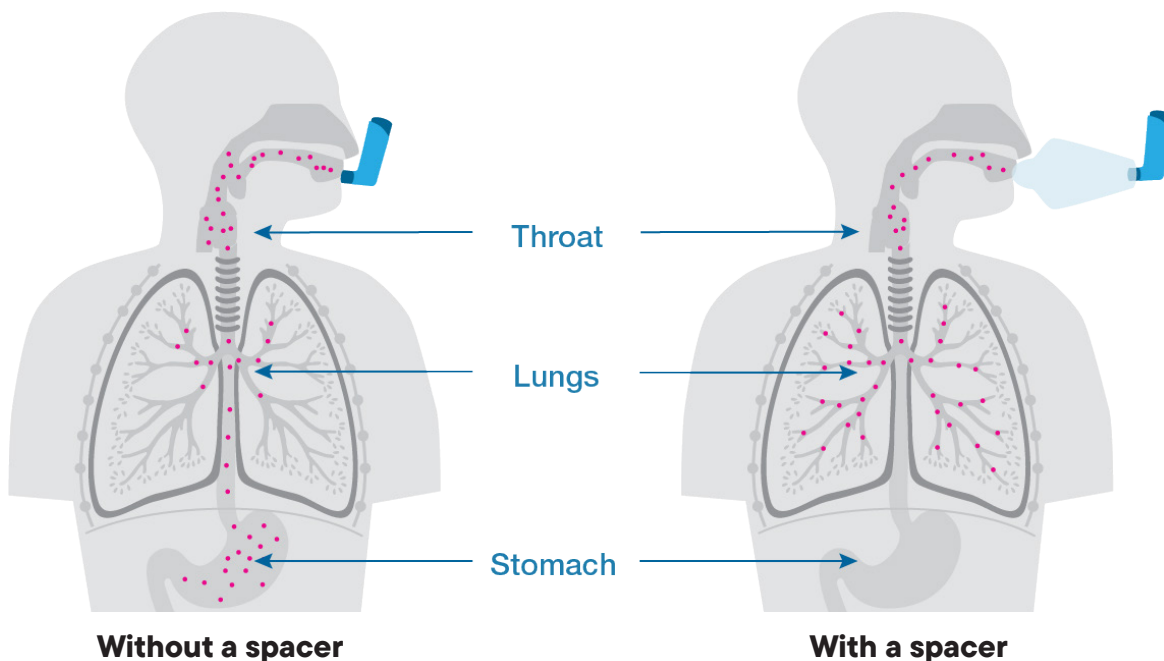
- Keeping your inhaler clean between uses

If oral thrush does occur, it can be treated with topical antifungal treatments.

What is a spacer, and do I need to use one?

A spacer is a device that attaches to your inhaler. It helps more medicine reach your lungs, reducing the amount left in your mouth or throat. This makes the medication more effective and can reduce side effects.

Spacers are recommended for both adults and children. Younger children may need a spacer with a face mask. Spacers are for single person use only. Wash them monthly and after respiratory infections.





Asthma management and emergencies

What is an Asthma Action Plan?

An Asthma Action Plan is a written plan prepared by your doctor that outlines your asthma medicines and when to use them.

It helps you to:

- Recognise when your asthma symptoms are getting worse
- Know when and how to adjust your medication
- Understand what to do in an asthma emergency

Both adults and children with asthma should have an Asthma Action Plan. It should be reviewed at least once a year, or sooner if your medications change or your asthma control worsens.

What should I do in an emergency?

Follow the person's Asthma Action Plan and commence Asthma First Aid. If there is no improvement or if their breathing doesn't return to normal, call 000 for an ambulance.

Sources:

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How we can help

Respiratory Care WA has a team of respiratory healthcare professionals here to provide information and support for Western Australians living with asthma and COPD. We offer in-person education and support at our respiratory hubs or via telehealth. Our team can also visit schools, workplaces or community and sporting groups to deliver free asthma management sessions. Email ask@respiratorycarewa.org.au to find out more.