

## ASTHMA

Asthma is a condition that can flare at any time but in summer there are some things that can particularly trigger it. What are they and how can they be managed?

### What is Asthma?

- Asthma is a disease of the airways which causes them to become narrow and inflamed.
- A person with asthma breaths normally except when they are having an asthma attack.

### What are the Symptoms of Asthma?

- Difficulty breathing – Tightness of the chest, a feeling like you can't breathe in fully or panting
- Wheezing or noisy breathing – particularly a high pitched sound while breathing
- A cough – especially a dry cough while breathing

### Can Asthma be cured?

- No – asthma can't be cured. It is a chronic condition which causes little problem if well managed.

### What Triggers Asthma Attacks?

- Smoke – Smoke from bushfires or from cigarettes can cause people without asthma to cough and trigger an attack in those with asthma.
- Thunderstorms – Thunderstorms especially when there is dust or smoke in the air may trigger an asthma attack as the raindrops "scatter" the dust making it easier to breathe in.
- Colds, flu and respiratory infections – Any infection that may cause non-asthmatics to cough heavily may trigger an asthma attack. Four out of five asthma attacks are caused by colds.
- Allergies – many allergies are caused by things we breathe in such as dust, mould, house mites and pollen. In people with asthma, this could trigger an attack. Hayfever, which can also be caused by these things, may also trigger an asthma attack.
- Certain medicines – especially aspirin and some medications such as blood pressure medication.
- Stress or crying – when stressed or crying our breathing becomes shallower and faster. This may trigger an attack.
- Exercise – exercise related asthma is surprisingly common especially in people who train outdoors or in cold or excessively dry weather.

### What Can You Do to Help Reduce the Risk of an Asthma Attack?

- Wear a face mask if there's smoke, dust or other things in the air that may trigger an attack.
- If there's smoke from a bushfire – move to an area where the air is cleaner or stay inside.
- Make sure you have medication on hand – even if you're just going out for the evening.
- Follow your asthma management plan – speak to your doctor if you don't have one.
- Check the pollen count website (<https://www.melbournepollen.com.au>) for pollen count and thunderstorm asthma forecasts.

### What do you do if Someone is Having an Asthma Attack?

- If someone is having an asthma attack:
  - Sit the person up
  - Find their puffer, shake it and give one puff into their spacer and let them take four breaths
  - Wait four minutes. If no improvement, do again.
  - If no improvement, call the ambulance – but keep giving medication (one puff/four breaths) until the ambulance arrives.
- Asthma can be lethal – do not leave the person alone.

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