Smoking & asthma
During an asthma attack your airways become smaller and breathing is more difficult.

ASTHMA – THE FACTS

- Asthma is a very common illness affecting around 15% of children and 11% of adults.
- Asthma is one of the most common causes of hospitalisation of children in Australia.
- Asthma can result in time off work or school, and can limit physical or social activities.
- In 2003, 314 Australians died from asthma.
What is asthma?

Asthma is a condition which affects the small airways of the lungs. People with asthma have sensitive, or ‘twitchy’ airways. When these sensitive airways are exposed to certain ‘triggers’, such as cigarette smoke, the airways can narrow, making it harder to breathe.

The airways become narrow because the lining of the airways becomes red and swollen (inflamed), the lungs may produce extra mucus, and the muscles around the airways tighten. This reduces the flow of air in and out of the lungs.

Air travels down the windpipe through the large and small tubes into the lungs.

There is currently no cure for asthma, but asthma can be managed. People with well-managed asthma can lead full and productive lives.
Smoking and your lungs

Smoking causes symptoms such as coughing, phlegm, wheezing and difficulty breathing in adults and young people who smoke. Smoking also disrupts the cilia, the tiny hair-like structures that line the airways and clean out dust and dirt. This can lead to mucus and toxic substances collecting in the lungs, increasing the risk of lung disease. Smoking can damage the small airways within the lung, gradually reducing lung function and causing emphysema.

Smokers with asthma have more asthma symptoms, worse asthma control, faster loss of lung function, more airway inflammation, and get less benefit from some asthma medications, compared to people with asthma who don’t smoke.

Research shows that stopping smoking may reduce asthma symptoms and use of medication within a few months. Stopping smoking is essential for your lung health and management of your asthma.

Passive smoking

Passive smoking is breathing in other people’s cigarette smoke. Smoke from the burning end of the cigarette, known as sidestream smoke, contains higher concentrations of some toxic chemicals than the smoke inhaled by the smoker.

Even though the cigarette smoke is diluted by the air, it can be very harmful to people with asthma because of their very sensitive air passages. Cigarette smoke is a common trigger of asthma.
**Adults**

Passive smoking increases the risk of adults developing asthma. Passive smoking can worsen asthma symptoms and reduce lung function among adults with asthma. This may lead to increased use of medication, greater use of health care and more absence from work.

**Children**

Passive smoking can cause childhood asthma. Young children have smaller, more delicate lungs than adults, and are more affected by tobacco smoke. Children who have asthma, who live in a smoky environment, have more severe symptoms and suffer from more frequent asthma attacks. Their asthma starts at a younger age and they are more likely to use asthma medications.

Research shows that a *totally* smokefree home is the best protection from passive smoking for children.

**Pregnancy**

If a woman smokes during pregnancy, it reduces the flow of blood through the umbilical cord and the amount of oxygen available to her baby. The breathing movements that the baby practises before birth are reduced. Smoking during pregnancy is associated with lower birthweight and reduced lung function in children. It increases the likelihood of the baby developing wheezing symptoms early in life.

**REDUCE YOUR EXPOSURE TO CIGARETTE SMOKE**

- If you smoke, plan to quit now.
- Make your home and your car smokefree.
- Avoid smoky environments.
- Don’t let anyone smoke around you or your children.
Your 6 step asthma management plan

1. Know how severe your asthma is.
   Ask your doctor whether your asthma is mild, moderate or severe. Make sure you describe all your symptoms. If you are at risk of severe asthma attacks, you will need close follow-up.

2. Achieve your best lung function.
   Your doctor can help you find out how your lungs can function at their best. Taking the correct asthma medication is most important.

3. Identify and avoid your known asthma triggers.
   Try to avoid anything you know brings on your asthma.

4. Stay at your best.
   Understand your medications and use them as your doctor directs. This will control your symptoms and reduce the risk of asthma attacks.

5. Have a written Asthma Action Plan.
   Develop a written Asthma Action Plan with your doctor. This will help you to know how to recognise worsening asthma symptoms, how to treat them quickly and when to seek medical help.

6. Check your asthma regularly.
   Manage your asthma by following your personal written Asthma Action Plan and seeing your doctor regularly for asthma education and review. This will help control your asthma and achieve a better quality of life.
Help your asthma by stopping smoking

Quitline 13 7848 quit.org.au

One of the most important things you can do to help control your asthma is to quit smoking. If you are thinking about quitting or you need more support with quitting, call the Quitline.

The Quitline is a confidential telephone information and advice service. For the cost of a local call, professional telephone advisors provide encouragement and support to help smokers quit.

For more information on how to manage your asthma contact:

Asthma Foundation in your state
1800 645 130

National Asthma Council Australia
1800 032 495
www.nationalasthma.org.au

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