



# Fast Facts About Asthma



Changi  
General Hospital  
SingHealth

## What is asthma?

- ➔ Asthma is a chronic disease that affects the airways (breathing tubes) in the lungs.
- ➔ Patients with asthma have inflamed and narrowed airways, making breathing more difficult.
- ➔ It is a very common condition, affecting five per cent of adults and 20 per cent of children in Singapore.
- ➔ Asthma cannot be cured but it can be well-controlled.



## What are the symptoms of asthma?

Common symptoms of asthma include:

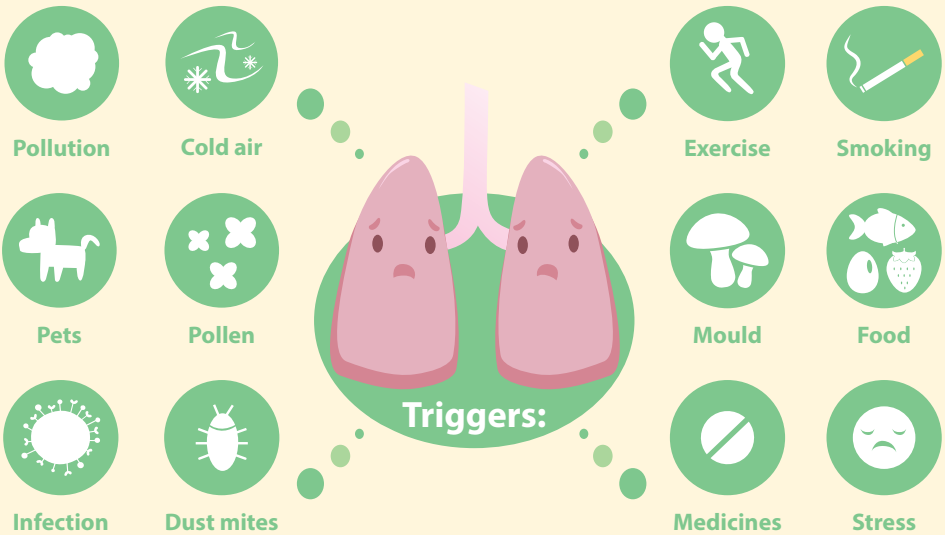


- ➔ Wheezing (a high-pitched sound from the chest when breathing)
- ➔ Shortness of breath
- ➔ Cough

You may not experience all the symptoms described above.

## What causes asthma?

- The exact causes of asthma are not known but are likely to be due to a mixture of genetic factors and environmental factors.
- Asthma may run in the family, but may also develop in a person without a family history of asthma.



## What are common asthma triggers?

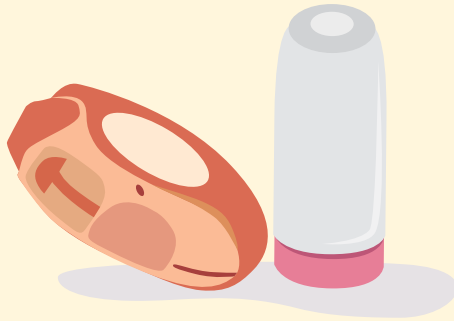
- Triggers are factors that can cause the airways to become more inflamed and narrower than usual, leading to increased symptoms.
- Triggers differ from person-to-person. These include:
  - I. Colds, flu and other chest infections
  - II. Allergens such as house dust mites, pets or pollen
  - III. Cigarette smoke
  - IV. Irritants such as air pollution
  - V. Exercise
  - VI. Stress and strong emotions

## How is asthma treated?

Asthma is typically treated by inhaled medication as this route allows the medicine to reach your airways directly.

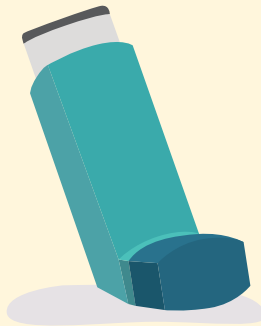
There are two main types of inhaled asthma medication that you may be prescribed:

### Preventers (also known as "controllers"):



- a. Inhaled corticosteroids are the most important part of your asthma treatment. They reduce airway inflammation, improve asthma symptoms and prevent asthma attacks.
- b. You should use your preventer every day as prescribed by your doctor even when you have no symptoms.

### Relievers:



- a. Relievers relax airway muscles and temporarily reduce airway narrowing.
- b. You should use your reliever only when you have asthma symptoms.

## What is an asthma attack and what should I do?

- ➔ An asthma attack happens when there is very severe narrowing of the airways, causing you to experience asthma symptoms that are more severe than your usual.
- ➔ Do not ignore worsening asthma symptoms as asthma attacks can be fatal.
- ➔ When you experience an asthma attack, do not panic.
- ➔ Follow instructions according to your written asthma action plan (WAAP). If you do not have one, speak to your doctor or nurse about it.



Normal Bronchial Tube



Inflamed Bronchial Tube  
in Asthma



Inflamed Bronchial Tube  
During in Attack

## Why must I take my preventer even when I feel well?

- ➔ Airway inflammation is still present even when you feel well.
- ➔ Preventers make your airways less sensitive by reducing airway inflammation. This reduces your risk of having an asthma attack.

## Relievers make me feel better faster. Why can't just take my reliever only?

- ➔ Relievers only open up the airways briefly but have no effect on airway inflammation.
- ➔ Using relievers alone without preventers increases the risk of severe asthma attacks and even death.

## Should I be worried about taking inhaled corticosteroids long-term?

- ➔ Inhaled corticosteroids are very safe!
- ➔ As the medicine goes directly to your airways, very little is absorbed into your blood. You do not get side-effects such as weight gain, osteoporosis or diabetes that happen when corticosteroids are taken orally.
- ➔ You will not become "addicted" to inhaled corticosteroids.



## What is good asthma control and why is it important?

Your asthma is considered well-controlled if :

- Your activities are not limited by asthma.
- You have no asthma symptoms during the night when you sleep.
- You have daytime symptoms infrequently (not more than two days a week).
- You use your reliever infrequently (not more than two times a week).

Having good asthma control not only reduces your risk of having an asthma attack, it lowers the risk of irreversible damage to your airways and allows you to lead a normal active lifestyle.

## What can I do to manage my asthma?

- ➔ Take your preventer regularly as instructed by your doctor.
- ➔ Follow your written asthma action plan (WAAP).
- ➔ If you smoke, quit smoking. You may wish to speak to your doctor or pharmacist about ways to help you quit.
- ➔ Avoid triggers that worsen your asthma.
- ➔ Go for yearly flu vaccinations.

## Can I exercise if I have asthma?



- ➔ Yes. It is just as important for people with asthma to exercise as anyone else. Although exercise may be an asthma trigger, most people with well-controlled asthma are able to enjoy all kinds of exercises without any problem. It may be a good idea to have your reliever with you when you exercise.
- ➔ No specific type of exercise is particularly recommended for asthma. Just remember to warm up before exercising and build up your fitness gradually.



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