This brochure has been developed for the community by Asthma Australia

It provides information about:

— Asthma triggers
— What you can do about them

To find out more about asthma contact your local Asthma Foundation
1800 ASTHMA (1800 278 462)
asthmaaustralia.org.au

Translating and Interpreting Service
131 450

Asthma Australia thanks The Raw Image for photography

All Asthma Australia information is endorsed by our Medical and Scientific Advisory Committee and is consistent with the National Asthma Council Australia clinical guidelines.

Asthma Australia information does not replace professional medical advice. People should ask their doctor any questions about diagnosis and treatment.

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Trigger

is the word we use to describe something that can...

set off your asthma symptoms or make them worse

This could be something that you:

— Breathe in (eg smoke, cool air)
— Catch (eg cold, flu)
— Feel (eg emotions, stress)
— Do (eg exercise)
— Eat or drink, take (eg medicines)
People with asthma have a range of common symptoms:

— Breathlessness
— Wheezing
— Tight chest
— Persistent cough

Symptoms often occur at night, early in the morning or during or after activity.

Many people with asthma also get hayfever when they come into contact with triggers. Symptoms of hayfever include a runny or blocked nose, itchy eyes and sneezing.

**What are asthma symptoms?**

**Triggers and symptoms**

Exposure to triggers can happen anytime and anywhere. People react to different triggers, and this can change over time.

It is useful to know what triggers your asthma symptoms so you can avoid them or respond by using your reliever medicine. Some triggers can be easy to identify, for example, someone near you smoking cigarettes. There will be a clear link between the trigger and your asthma getting worse. Sometimes your asthma will get worse, and you may not be able to work out why.
There are some key things people with asthma can do to live well with asthma

— Learn about asthma
— See your doctor regularly to review your asthma
— Take your asthma medicine as prescribed, in particular your preventer medicine. Preventers can take days or even several weeks to fully work and will help you handle triggers
— Recognise and respond to your symptoms
— Ask your doctor for an up-to-date written asthma action plan and follow it if your asthma worsens
— Learn Asthma First Aid (see back page)

Living well with asthma means less symptoms and being able to do the things you enjoy
What to do if you have several asthma triggers

If you find that several different triggers make your asthma worse, it usually means that you are not getting enough preventer medicine, and that there is extra inflammation in your airways.

Take these steps:

— Check that you are using your preventer medicine correctly - ask your doctor, pharmacist or local Asthma Foundation
— Take your preventer every day
— See your doctor for a review of your asthma medicine and dose
— Make sure your written asthma action plan is up to date

When you are taking your medicine correctly you will have less symptoms and less reaction to triggers.
Triggers definitely
NOT to be avoided

These include:

— Exercise
— Laughter

If you find that exercise or laughter make your asthma symptoms worse, check that you are using your preventer medicine correctly and taking it every day.

If you are still getting asthma symptoms with exercise, see your doctor for:

— A review of your preventer medicine - check you are using it correctly
— Advice about how to use your medicine before exercise
— A check that the symptoms are not due to something other than asthma

Triggers to definitely avoid

These include:

Some work-related triggers
For example spray paint. Consider using protective equipment.

Some medicines Always talk with your doctor about starting or stopping any medicines. For most people with asthma, beta-blockers (used for high blood pressure, heart failure or as eyedrops for glaucoma) will make their asthma worse. For some people with asthma, aspirin or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicine may make their asthma worse. If you need any of these medicines, make sure your doctor knows you have asthma. Aspirin and some non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicines are available without prescription - some from supermarkets. They include ibuprofen (brands: Nurofen, Advil & Herron) and diclofenac (a pharmacy only drug, brand: Voltaren).

Check with your pharmacist or doctor before using them.

Cat allergen If you are allergic to cats, even keeping the cat outside is unlikely to stop you getting symptoms.

Cigarette smoke This makes asthma symptoms worse and stops the preventer medicine working fully.

Indoor air pollution Make sure your house is well ventilated if you use gas, wood or coal for heating or cooking. Gas heaters should be flued (i.e. have a chimney or vent to outside).

Thunderstorms in spring and summer If you are allergic to grass, stay inside with the windows and doors closed until after the storm has passed. Make sure you have your preventer and reliever medication; follow your asthma plan; and carry out Asthma First Aid if symptoms worsen (see back page).
These include:

**Colds and viral infections**
These may make your asthma worse even if you are taking your preventer treatment regularly. Make sure your written asthma action plan is up to date - and tells you how to respond to a cold/flu. You can reduce your risk of catching viral infections from family members or other contacts by washing your hands before you eat or touch your face.

There is some evidence that increasing your preventer treatment as soon as your asthma worsens with a cold can reduce the chance of a flare up - ask your doctor about this.

**Cold dry air in winter in colder climates**
Try to breathe through your nose, to help warm and moisten the air before it reaches your airways. Putting a scarf over your mouth and nose when you go outside may also help.
In the past there have been a wide range of suggestions for things to do, to buy or try to help reduce exposure to dust mite. There is currently no evidence that doing these things is useful or will help your asthma.

These approaches may be costly and current advice is to focus on gaining control of symptoms by using asthma medicine correctly. This is known to be cost effective.

It is highly unlikely that efforts to remove a (suspected) trigger will make a person’s asthma completely go away. The only exception is in some cases of occupational asthma.
If your response to a trigger starts with hayfever (itching of the nose, sneezing, itchy eyes), treating the hayfever may reduce the chance of your asthma getting worse.

If your response to a trigger includes symptoms such as swelling of the lips or mouth, or skin rashes, this may indicate a serious allergy and it is important to see your doctor immediately. You may need special testing to identify the trigger and extra medicine for safety.

For some people with a single allergic trigger, long-term desensitisation (immunotherapy) may be an option.

It is important to discuss any questions or concerns you may have with your doctor. Work with your doctor to develop an asthma plan that helps you live well with asthma.

### Asthma First Aid

1. **Sit the person upright**
   - Be calm and reassuring
   - Do not leave them alone

2. **Give 4 puffs of blue reliever puffer medication**
   - Use a spacer if there is one
   - **Shake** puffer
   - Put 1 puff into spacer
   - Take 4 breaths from spacer
   - Repeat until 4 puffs have been taken
   
   Remember: Shake, 1 puff, 4 breaths

3. **Wait 4 minutes**
   - If there is no improvement, give 4 more puffs as above

4. **If there is still no improvement call emergency assistance (DIAL 000)**
   - Say ‘ambulance’ and that someone is having an asthma attack
   - Keep giving 4 puffs every 4 minutes until emergency assistance arrives

   *If calling Triple Zero (000) does not work on your mobile phone, try 112

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**Call emergency assistance immediately (DIAL 000)**

- If the person is not breathing
- If the person’s asthma suddenly becomes worse, or is not improving
- If the person is having an asthma attack and a puffer is not available
- If you are not sure if it’s asthma

Blue reliever medication is unlikely to harm, even if the person does not have asthma.