



**University  
Hospitals Sussex**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Asthma advice

Accident and emergency

Patient information

## What is asthma?

Asthma is a common long-term condition that affects your lungs. It makes your airways (the tubes that carry air in and out of your lungs) more sensitive.

When these airways are irritated by certain triggers, they become inflamed and narrow. This can cause the following symptoms:

- Wheezing
- Shortness of breath
- Coughing
- A tight feeling in your chest.

Asthma symptoms can sometimes get worse suddenly, even without a clear reason.

## Common triggers include

- Pollen, dust, and animal fur
- Smoke and pollution
- Chest infections or colds
- Exercise
- Changes in the weather
- Substances at work (like fumes or dust).

There is no cure for asthma, but with the right treatment, most people live normal, active lives.

**For more information, visit:**

[Asthma.org.uk](https://www.asthma.org.uk)

[patient.co.uk/asthma](https://patient.co.uk/asthma)

## How is asthma treated?

Most asthma is treated with inhalers, and sometimes tablets. There are two main types of inhalers:

1. **Reliever inhalers.** Used when symptoms appear. They quickly relax the airways to make breathing easier.
2. **Preventer inhalers.** These are used every day, even when you feel well. They help stop symptoms from starting by reducing inflammation in your airways.

Your doctor might also prescribe **steroids** to help reduce swelling in your airways.

If your symptoms do not improve, or your diagnosis is uncertain, you may be referred to a lung specialist.

## How to manage asthma at home

1. **Monitor your asthma.** You may be given a peak flow meter. This is a small device to measure how fast you can blow air out of your lungs. Keeping a diary of your readings can help track your progress. Your GP practice may also have an asthma nurse who can help you manage your treatment.
2. **Stop smoking.** Smoking or breathing in other people's smoke makes asthma worse. Your GP or nurse can support you to stop. You can also contact a local Stop Smoking Service via [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk).
3. **Use your inhaler properly.** Using your inhaler with the correct technique is important so the medicine reaches your lungs. We will check your technique before you leave hospital, but your practice nurse can also help.

If you find inhalers hard to use, you might be given a spacer, which is a plastic tube that makes inhalers easier and more effective.

- 4. Avoid your triggers.** Your doctor or asthma nurse can help you identify things that make your asthma worse and work with you to avoid them.
- 5. Use your asthma action plan.** You should have a written asthma action plan from your doctor. It explains:
  - How to stay well
  - What to do if symptoms worsen
  - How to manage an asthma attack.

Keep it handy and refer to it often.

## Before you leave hospital

We will work with you to create a care plan. This will include how to manage your asthma at home and what treatment to take.

Your GP will receive a summary of your hospital visit.  
When you leave hospital please book an appointment with them as soon as possible.

### Signs your asthma may be getting worse

**Contact your GP or asthma nurse if you notice:**

- Needing your reliever inhaler more often
- Waking at night with symptoms (coughing, wheezing, chest tightness)
- Missing work or daily activities
- Your peak flow readings dropping
- Struggling with physical activity or exercise.

# How to manage an asthma attack

An asthma attack is a sudden worsening of symptoms caused by the tightening of muscles around your airways.

## Signs of an asthma attack:

- Severe breathlessness
- Difficulty speaking
- Wheezing or chest tightness that does not go away with your reliever inhaler.

## What to do:

1. Sit up straight and stay calm.
2. Take one puff of your reliever inhaler (usually blue) every 30–60 seconds, up to a maximum of 10 puffs.
3. If you feel worse at any point or do not feel better after 10 puffs, call 999 immediately for an ambulance.
4. While waiting for the ambulance, repeat step 2 after 10-15 minutes if necessary.

Asthma attacks can be life-threatening, so please follow these instructions if you feel you may be experiencing one.

Make sure your family or friends know what to do in case you are unable to call for help yourself.

## Further support

For general medical advice please use the NHS website, the **NHS 111** service, walk-in-centres, or your GP.

The NHS website provides online health information and guidance.

There are walk-in and urgent treatment services at Brighton Station, Crawley Urgent Treatment Centre, Lewes Victoria Hospital, Horsham Minor Injuries Unit and Bognor Regis War Memorial Hospital.



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in Brighton & Hove or Haywards Heath.

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