

Asthma in Children and Young People

Asthma is a common condition that affects the small airways of the lungs (these are the tubes that carry air in and out of the lungs).

The airways are inflamed and very sensitive, they react to triggers and narrow very easily.

When the airways react to a trigger, they become narrow because the muscles around the airway tighten up and more mucous (phlegm) can be produced. This makes it hard for a child to breathe.

What are the symptoms of asthma?

- Wheezing
- Coughing - especially at night
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness (sometimes described as a tummy ache by younger children).

What are asthma triggers?

A trigger is anything that can irritate the sensitive airways and cause symptoms. It is common to have several of these and everyone's asthma can be triggered by different things. Some common examples are:

- Viruses e.g. the common cold
- Exercise
- Emotions e.g. stress, excitement
- Changes in weather.

- Allergies
- Cigarette smoke
- Pets
- House dust mites.

By understanding what triggers your child's asthma, you might be able to help prevent asthma attacks.

How is asthma treated?

There are two types of medication used to treat asthma, those being 'relievers' and 'preventers'.

Relievers: These usually take the form of a blue inhaler (Salbutamol). They work quickly to relieve asthma symptoms by relaxing the muscles around the airway, allowing air in and out of the lungs more easily.

Preventers: This usually takes the form of steroid medication, given as an inhaler. Preventers help to reduce inflammation in the airways and thereby control asthma.

You must ensure your child takes their preventer inhaler every day, at the dosage prescribed by their doctor. Your child must not have extra doses without advice from a doctor, as this can be harmful. Please ensure your child washes their mouth after taking their preventer.

When asthma symptoms become worse, your child may require a boost of steroid medication and their doctor may give them an oral steroid medication for 3 or 5 days.

IMPORTANT: If your child needs their blue inhaler frequently (e.g. more than three times a week), then their asthma may not be well-controlled. This could be because their preventer inhaler is not being taken properly, or because their medication needs to be reviewed.

Either way, please arrange to see your child's doctor or asthma nurse in this instance.

How can I help my child stay well?

- Ensure your child has a Personalised Asthma Action Plan. If your child does not have a plan, please see the doctor or nurse responsible for your child's asthma care.
- Make sure your child's nursery/school are aware that your child has asthma and that your child always has access to their reliever inhaler.
- Even if your child's asthma is well controlled, it is still important for them to see their GP for an annual asthma review.
- If your child has been admitted to hospital, or has visited A&E because of their asthma, please see your GP within 48 hours of discharge.

Smoking

Exposure to tobacco smoke can increase the chance of your child having a potentially life-threatening asthma attack.

The chemicals in the smoke irritate the airways and can stay on your clothing; your hair and skin until long after you have finished the cigarette.

By giving up smoking, you will be improving your child's health. Advice and support can be accessed through your GP or the NHS Smoke Free service.

Further information and support:

Asthma UK Visit www.asthma.org.uk or call 0300 222 5800

NHS Smoke Free Visit www.nhs.uk/smokefree or call

Doncaster Stop Smoking Service: 0800 612 0011

Bassetlaw Stop Smoking Service: 0800 246 5343.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service

The team are available to help with any concerns/complaints you may have about your experience at the Trust. Their office is in the Main Foyer (Gate 4) of Doncaster Royal Infirmary. Contact can be made either in person, by telephone or email.

The contact details are:

Telephone: 01302 642764 or 0800 028 8059

Email: dbth.pals.dbh@nhs.net