



Children and Asthma

Asthma sufferers have very sensitive airways that narrow in response to certain triggers, like allergens, pollen, grass and exercise, leading to difficulty in breathing. Inflammation and swelling of the airway lining, the tightening of the airways and the production of excess mucus causes the airway to narrow. As a result, there is reduced air travelling in and out of the lungs.

Asthma prevalence in Australia

Over two million Australians have asthma: one in four primary school children, one in seven teenagers, and one in ten adults. About 30% of all Australians will have symptoms consistent with asthma at some time in their lives.

In very young children, prevalence is slightly higher in boys than in girls but evens out in adult life. Australia has the third highest worldwide rate of current

What triggers asthma symptoms?

Viral infections e.g. colds and 'flu	Exercise (this can be managed)
Inhaled allergens - e.g. pollens, moulds, animal hair and dust mites	Cigarette smoke
Changes in temperature and weather	Certain medications (e.g. aspirin and some blood pressure medications)
Chemicals and strong smells	Some foods and food preservatives, flavourings and colourings
Some occupations (e.g. baking, carpentry)	

Exercise - induced asthma in children

Under direction from your child's doctor exercise is often a part of a child's asthma treatment. Following the doctor's guidelines in taking medication before exercise can assist these children to enjoy normal physical activity. Parents should advise the instructor if their child has asthma. Generally, a child that has asthma:

- should be allowed to rest when needed;
- should be encouraged to use their reliever medication if needed and
- should not be forced to continue physical activity if feeling uncomfortable.

Is all exercise the same?

Running at fun-run pace for 6-8 minutes on a cold dry morning frequently brings on asthma however swimming at an equivalent intensity in a heated pool, rarely does so.

Brief exercise (less than 2 minutes) does not often cause asthma whereas prolonged exercise (say 6 minutes or more) is more likely to trigger an attack. However, there are some asthmatic people who can exercise for more than 10 minutes without having an asthma attack whereas exercise for a shorter period may have triggered their asthma.

The following websites contain information on asthma:

National Asthma Council Australia [National Asthma Council Australia (NAC)]

Australian Academy of Science [Australian Academy of Science]

Asthma SA 'Preparing for exercise'

<http://www.asthmasa.org.au/>

National Centre for Education in Maternal and Child Health (USA) Knowledge Path in physical activity for children.

http://www.mchlibrary.info/KnowledgePaths/kp_phys_activity.html

National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians

Active Australia, Commonwealth Department of Health and Aging, 2003

<http://www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/publicat/document/physguide.pdf>

World Health Organisation, 'Expert Report on diet and chronic disease'.

<http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/en/>