

# Asthma

## Help Yourself & Stay Well



The Asthma and  
Respiratory Foundation  
of New Zealand (Inc.)  
Te Taumatua Huango,  
Mate Ha o Aotearoa

**So you or someone in your family has asthma.**

**You are far from alone! Asthma is increasing worldwide. In New Zealand one in six adults and one in four children has asthma.**

**People with allergies are sensitive people! Common allergic conditions include:**

- **hayfever** – the nose and eyes are sensitive, and
- **eczema** – the skin is sensitive, and
- **asthma** – the airways in your lungs are sensitive.

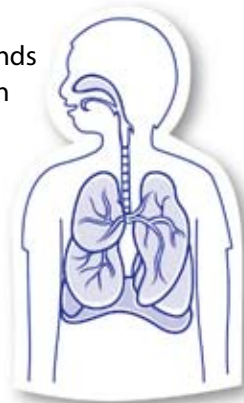
**Currently there is no cure for asthma but it can be well controlled.**



## What is asthma?

The word asthma comes from the ancient Greek word for 'panting attack'.

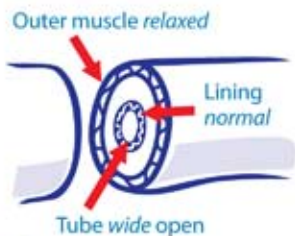
Your lungs are made up of thousands of tiny airways, which carry oxygen to the air sacs (alveoli), where it enters the bloodstream. People with asthma have very sensitive airways that react to asthma triggers and become tight and narrowed. This reduces the amount of air that you can get into your lungs.



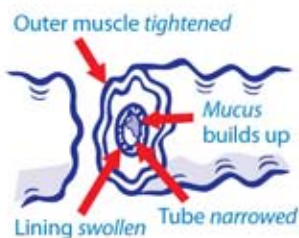
## What happens when I have asthma?

- The muscles around the airways tighten.
- The lining inside the airways swells and becomes red and inflamed.
- Mucus pours in from the lining and clogs up the tube.

*Healthy airway*



*Airway affected by asthma*



ff, mna  
wind, ventilation, p  
gust, breathe, lun

Narrowed airways may cause you to cough, wheeze, feel tight in the chest or get breathless. You may wake in the night or early morning coughing or unable to breathe. You may not be able to exercise or do all the things in the day that you want to without getting short of breath. Everyone reacts differently and has different triggers.

## What is an asthma trigger?

An asthma trigger is something that causes you to have an asthma attack or makes your asthma worse.

Some common triggers are:

- colds and flu
- cigarette smoke
- cats and other furry animals
- house dust mites (that live in dust and soft furnishings)
- exercise
- pollens
- changes in temperature
- stress or excitement.



Read more about asthma and triggers on our website [www.asthmafoundation.org.nz](http://www.asthmafoundation.org.nz) or in the *What is Asthma?* and *Triggers in Asthma* booklets.

...feel  
...puff, inhaler,  
...air, wind, take c

## How do I control my asthma?

When you have asthma your airways are sensitive all the time. However, you can do a lot to prevent your condition from flaring up. Medicine is the main treatment but there are other things you can do to keep yourself well and control your asthma.

### 1. Manage your triggers

Try to avoid the triggers that you can, for example cats, pollens and cigarette smoke. Try to reduce your exposure to other triggers like house dust mites. Some triggers can't be easily avoided, such as colds.

Physical activity will help your asthma so it is better to manage your asthma rather than avoid any activity. If exercise is a trigger for you, you can take a couple of puffs of your blue reliever inhaler just before starting. This should help you exercise without getting asthma.



Read more about physical activity on our website [www.asthmafoundation.org.nz](http://www.asthmafoundation.org.nz) or in the *Asthma, Breathing and Physical Activity* booklet.

weather, blow  
better, ventilation  
, be active, exhale  
control, learn more

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## 2. Take your medicine as your doctor has instructed you

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There are four main groups of asthma medicines:

- **Preventers** (brown/red/orange/yellow inhalers) – these stop your airways from reacting to triggers and prevents them becoming swollen and inflamed. Preventer inhalers must be taken every day even when you are well.
- **Relievers** (blue inhalers) – these bring short term relief from asthma. They relax the muscles around your airways when they tighten.
- **Symptom controllers** (pale blue/green inhalers) – these are long acting reliever medicines which keep the airway muscle relaxed for up to 12 hours. They are taken every day and must be used with preventer medicine.
- **Combinations** (red/purple inhalers) – these contain both preventer and symptom controller in one inhaler. They are taken every day.

Read more about medicines and how to control your asthma on our website [www.asthmafoundation.org.nz](http://www.asthmafoundation.org.nz) or in the *Understanding Your Inhaler* and *Controlling Your Asthma* booklets.



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### 3. Be prepared

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- Don't ignore your asthma and hope that it will go away on its own – it won't.
- As soon as you start to have signs of asthma use a "reliever" medicine to quickly open up your airways by relaxing the muscles.
- If you need to use your reliever more than three times a week you should have your preventer medicine reviewed by your doctor.
- Using a peak flow meter and monitoring your asthma symptoms will help you to recognise when your asthma is getting worse. A peak flow meter is available free from your doctor or asthma educator. They can show you how to use them.

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### 4. Get an asthma self management plan

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Everybody with asthma needs to know what to do in an asthma emergency. For information on what to do in an emergency visit the asthma emergency page on our website [www.asthmafoundation.org.nz](http://www.asthmafoundation.org.nz).

A written management plan will help you to recognise when your asthma is getting worse and tell you what to do. It puts you in control. Ask your doctor for your asthma management plan.

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### 5. Get vaccinated against the flu

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If you have asthma ask your doctor or nurse about a free flu vaccine. Getting infections in your chest, like the flu, will make your asthma worse. Getting vaccinated against the flu will reduce your chances of getting it.





## Who can help me manage my asthma?

There are many health professionals in your local community trained to assist you manage your asthma – your GP, practice nurse, pharmacist or asthma educator. Check to see if there is an asthma society close to you.



**You CAN control your asthma.  
Don't let asthma control you!**

Your local asthma educator

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to make an automatic \$20 donation.  
All donations are appreciated

The Foundation is a non-governmental charitable organisation providing education, research and advocacy on all respiratory conditions.