Asthma

What is Asthma?

Asthma is a condition that affects the airways, causing them to become inflamed and narrowed when the asthma is triggered, making it difficult to breathe. It commonly starts in childhood but can develop at any age. There are currently around 5.4 million people in the UK whose lives are affected by asthma.

Asthma Triggers

A trigger is anything that irritates the airways and causes the symptoms of asthma. Everyone's asthma is different and there may be several triggers. It is important to identify these triggers, so that they can be avoided. Some of the most common are:

- **animals** household pets such as cats, dogs and birds are common triggers for asthma.
- **food** some foods such as cow's milk, shellfish, eggs, fish and nuts are known to make symptoms worse in some sufferers. Asthma UK's leaflet Food Reactions & Asthma gives more information on this.
- **house dust mites** if they are a trigger for your asthma, you may find it helpful if you wash all bedding once a week, replace carpets with hard flooring, steam clean and vacuum frequently.
- **pollen** check pollen forecasts regularly. If the count is high, try to reduce the amount of time that you spend outdoors.
- **smoking** – by smoking you are increasing your risk of an asthma attack, and may cause permanent damage to your airways.
- **weather** – sudden changes in temperature, cold air, wind, and hot humid weather are all known triggers for asthma.
- **emotions** – stress and even laughter can cause an asthma attack.
- **colds and viral infections** – these are very common triggers of asthma. If you regularly use a preventer inhaler or steroid tablets to control your asthma, it is recommended that you have the flu vaccination.

In older people, asthma is less likely to be triggered by allergies such as house dust mites, pets and pollen. Symptoms are more likely to be triggered by colds, smoke and cold air, or emotions such as excitement or anxiety.

How to Control your Symptoms

There are several treatments available to help control asthma, but unfortunately there is no cure. Inhalers, steroid tablets or nebulisers may be recommended by your GP. Some people find that

complementary therapies are helpful for controlling symptoms.

Exercise is also very important for people with asthma. Among other things, it helps to strengthen the lungs, which can reduce symptoms. Yoga, swimming or brisk walking will all be beneficial. For more details please see the **Leisure Section** on Information Now.

Local help and support

Many **GP surgeries** hold regular asthma clinics. Contact your surgery for details.

British Lung Foundation runs local exercise classes and breathe easy classes for people living with a lung condition.

Asthma and Lung UK provide information, advice and guidance to help patients, carers, family members and friends manage their lung condition. Helping you to learn more about your lung condition, how to manage your symptoms, to improve your physical and mental wellbeing. They have a

- telephone helpline where you can speak to respiratory nurses, health care advisors and specialist nurses.
- **Monthly support group** to help patients, carers, family members and friends manage their lung condition

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Other useful information

- **Asthma UK**
- **Healthtalk.org**
- **The Patient Information Centre** offers a range of health related information including;
    - medical conditions
    - procedures and treatments
    - details about self help and support groups
    - information about complaints procedures
    - copies of leaflets

- **NHS 111** is the new telephone service which has replaced NHS Direct. You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is a fast and easy way to get the right help, whatever the time.
- **NHS.UK** is a website providing health and medical advice, an online symptom checker and a facility for searching for services near you.

> **Please note** – The content on this website is provided for general information only, and should not be treated as a substitute for the medical advice of your own doctor or any other health care professional. If you are feeling unwell, make an appointment to see your GP or contact **NHS 111**. In an emergency, dial **999**.

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Useful Organisations

Patient Information Centre – Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust (CNTW)

Website: www.cntw.nhs.uk

Telephone: 0191 246 7288

Address: St Nicholas Hospital, NE3 3XT

Asthma and Lung UK

Email: helpline@asthmaandlung.org.uk

Website: https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/

Telephone: 0300 222 5800

Address: 18 Mansell Street, E1 8AA

healthtalk.org

Email: info@healthtalkonline.org

Website: www.healthtalk.org

Telephone: 0300 222 5800

NHS 111

Website: www.nhs.uk/111

Telephone: 0300 222 5800

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