

Coping With Asthma



Introduction

If you suffer with asthma, you will no doubt be familiar with the uncomfortable sensations as your bronchial tubes begin to narrow and your muscles around them start to tighten. A sticky mucus known as phlegm begins to produce and increase within your bronchial tubes and you begin to wheeze, cough and struggle to breathe.

As these symptoms continue, you will also start to feel a restrictive tightness in your chest as well and these sensations are far from pleasant. This happens when you have come into contact with something that has acted as a trigger and it has made your bronchial tubes inflamed and increased their sensitivity as a result.

Whilst asthma is often manageable, it should be treated with respect and the correct medication taken always, because on occasions, it can be life threatening.

This report takes a look at the triggers responsible for causing asthma attacks, how to identify your own triggers and to adapt your life accordingly and how to improve your lungs with gentle breathing techniques.

Common Triggers of Asthma

Triggers vary from person to person so there is no one thing that an asthmatic should avoid; instead it's more a case of understanding how the condition affects you on an individual level. Because asthma varies in its severity, some people may only be occasionally susceptible whilst others may have several triggers making it difficult to completely avoid the symptoms of asthma. Tobacco smoke, exercise, animal fur, pollen, house dust mites, pollution, cold air or chest infections can all trigger off a full blown asthma attack.

A trigger can be anything that irritates the airways and brings on the symptoms of asthma and if you can eliminate contact with your own

personal triggers, you are more likely to be able to control an asthmatic response.

Outlook

Whilst there are treatments for asthma, there is currently no cure for the disease and the symptoms can seem to come and go. It's important to think of how to provide relief against any symptoms experienced and this will become apparent through experience, through research and through learning how to prevent any future attacks.

Danger Signals

Asthma attacks have varying degrees of urgency but can certainly be serious so if any of the following symptoms are experienced, medical attention should be sought.

1. Shortness of breath so that you are unable to complete a sentence.
2. Gasping for breath and your skin has a bluish tinge to it. This coloration may be noticeable around your fingertips or your lips.
3. Exhaustion to the point where no speech is possible.
4. Drowsiness.
5. Feelings of confusion or restlessness.
6. Increased breathing with no wheezing. But there can be very little signs of air moving in and out of the lungs.

You may notice some unusual symptoms in addition;

- Fatigue
- Problems sleeping
- Anxiousness
- Lack of concentration

- Chronic cough but with an absence of wheezing

Smoking? Why You Should Stop

Smoking is bad for all but has a serious impact on anyone suffering from asthma. It's important to stop smoking completely to enable your lungs to heal from the toxic chemicals that you inhale each and every time that you have a cigarette. Asthma can damage your lungs anyway, so the last thing that you want to do is to aggravate your lungs and bronchial tubes yet further.

If you are serious about improving your health, then it's good to be prepared and plan for the day that you finally stop. Part of the preparation can be to keep a diary which will show you quite clearly why, when and where you smoke. In other words, it provides a detailed study of your smoking addiction and the best way to approach it so that you can beat it.

By learning when you become most tempted to light up, you can start to plan how to avoid temptation. You know why you need to give up smoking, so remember your reasons and plan your goals carefully. Set a date and then make sure that you stick to it. Your lungs will thank you for it.

Asthma Types

There are four different types of asthma and to help keep the condition under control, it's important to ascertain the correct diagnosis.

- Intermittent – this is where you may have asthma symptoms for two days a week or even less. You might wake up from asthma related symptoms for less than two nights a week and you may use your inhaler for less than two days during the week and find that usually, asthma does not interfere much with any daily activities.

Your Doctor may prescribe a quick relief bronchodilator for those occasions when the symptoms flare up.

- Mild Persistent – You may experience symptoms for more than 2 days a week, find that you wake up from asthma related symptoms for approximately 3 to 4 nights during the month and that your asthma has only mild interference in connection with your general daily activities. With mild persistent asthma you may use your inhaler for more than a couple of days a week but you do not use it every day.

Treatment is a daily anti-inflammatory medication but you will need a low dosage inhaled steroid treatment too.

- Moderate Persistent – You will suffer with asthmatic symptoms daily, find that you wake from your sleep at least one night a week but use your inhaler daily. Your asthma may be a cause of interference within your daily routine.

You will need asthma medication on a daily basis and a low dosage inhaled steroid combined with a long-lasting beta agonist.

- Severe Persistent – you will have asthmatic symptoms throughout the day. Symptoms will often wake you up nightly and you will use your rescue inhaler multiple times daily. Severe persistent asthma will interfere with your daily life.

Treatment will often mean medium or high doses of inhaled steroids plus a long lasting beta agonist. You will also need anti-inflammatory asthma medication.

Asthma in Children

Asthma is a chronic childhood disease and in America alone, approximately 9 million children have been diagnosed with asthma but this condition is spread on a global scale.

Having a correct diagnosis is vital because symptoms will vary and not all wheezes or coughing bouts are indicators of asthma. A high percentage of children (approximately 85%) develop asthma before they are even five years old. Studies have indicated that those children who

live in rural areas have less asthmatic problems than those who live in cities.

Children who have had exposure to smoke are at risk as links have been determined that smoking is a major contributor to the development of asthma so it's important to eradicate the negative aspects of passive smoking if there are children about. Other triggers can be cockroach allergens, dust mites, or pet allergens so this places a significant emphasis on a good cleaning routine.

There are some viewpoints that suggest people can be born with the condition and that there is little that can be done regarding this if this is the case, but studies have been done to suggest that environmental exposure to pollen or pet allergens within the first six months of life could be a trigger for asthma developing later.

Children are definitely more susceptible to allergic or viral triggers than most adults and it's vital that steps are taken to identify any triggers and to teach the child to recognize them for themselves as part of an asthma strategy plan and of course to avoid them as much as possible. Surprisingly, Ibuprofen seems to be largely responsible for asthmatic symptoms being experienced by over 100,000 children.

Self-Help

Exercise should still play an important part of your life providing that your asthma has been diagnosed and is under control. Exercise obviously keeps the bones, digestive system and heart healthy and helps you to cope with any stress or strains on a daily basis.

If you haven't exercised for a while, make sure that you have a check-up with your doctor to ensure that your medication is sufficient for your needs and then start any exercise regime slowly. Your intentions might be good but over-doing it in the early stages could irritate your asthma and this could well set your fitness regime back some time.

Try to do about 30 minutes of exercise three or more times a week. You don't need to go to the gym if this type of exercise is not stimulating enough; any exercise that you choose to do should be fun, just ensure that you don't overdo it and follow these steps.

- Start slowly and build your exercise up a little at a time.
- Ensure that others, who are exercising with you, are aware that you are asthmatic.
- Keep your inhaler with you at all times.
- If you find that exercise often triggers your asthma, warm up first and use your inhaler.
- Make sure that you warm up and down.
- If asthmatic symptoms are experienced during exercise, stop and take your inhaler. At all times, listen to your body.

Options

Aerobic exercise in the form of a fitness class, running, swimming, cycling or dancing will improve muscle tone and your stamina but it will also, importantly improve circulation and heart and lung capacity. You can join a class or buy a DVD so that you can practice at home.

Yoga provides a whole mind; body and spirit work out with gentle postures that work in complete harmony with your body. In addition, a total yoga practice session will also incorporate special breathing techniques and these techniques are often excellent for asthma sufferers as they work on breath control and opening up the lungs. Yoga teaches you to be 'mindful' and this means become intuitive with how you feel throughout, these techniques are excellent for asthma sufferers.

Swimming is a great work out and fantastic if you have asthma because the warm humid environment is less likely to trigger off any asthmatic symptoms. It is worth noting however that some chemicals which are used in a swimming pool could trigger off a reaction in some.

There are two aspects to asthma, there are the periodic attacks and of course the underlying chronic inflammation that is suffered. It is unclear as to the exact cause of the chronic inflammation but studies have proven that there are a variety of different triggers which can cause an attack.

Often with exercise induced asthma, it is believed that the trigger is the rush of air into the lungs before it has warmed or humidified. This is

likely to happen because air is taken in through the mouth during exercise sessions.

If you think of asthma as an allergic response to a trigger that is effectively invading your body. The trigger could be anything, cold air, house dust, pollen etc, in fact anything that your body senses as being different.

A series of reactions are then set in place and these reactions lead to the increased production of mucus and the bronchial spasms which lead on to an asthma attack.

Certain types of sports or games that are played in cold weather can easily trigger off an attack.

- Running
- Football
- Basketball
- Cross Country Skiing
- Hockey

Some sports require shorter bursts of activity and are interspersed with regular breaks and these are less likely to cause asthma attacks.

- Walking
- Cycling
- Hiking
- Swimming
- Gymnastics
- Golf

If exercise is a trigger, then the symptoms often start within 20 minutes of starting the exercise and are often fully gone within an hour, gradually diminishing as time increases but they can last longer.

Symptoms include any of the following:

- Wheezing
- Chest Tightness
- Coughing
- Shortness of Breath
- Extreme Fatigue

Diet

It's important to eat a balanced diet but fortunately, asthmatics do not need to eat a specialized diet. It's worth noting that yeast products, nuts, eggs, fish, cow's milk, shell fish may make some of your symptoms worse and try to avoid any Royal Jelly products as these have been found to trigger symptoms. Whilst avoiding triggers can no doubt lessen the number of symptoms experienced, you still need to ensure that you continue with your regular asthma medication.

If you are overweight, try to set up a more healthy approach to your diet and of course, combine this with increased activity. Your diet needn't be fussy or expensive just invest in fresh fruit and vegetables, cereals and grains and ensure that you have plenty of water throughout the day.

Dutch research has indicated that those people who consumed the most vegetables and fruit had much healthier lung functions- especially important in the case of the asthmatic. Increased vitamin C and E are essential as they may help to relieve the severity of any inflammatory reaction within your lungs and of course, a nutritious diet, high in vitamins and minerals can help to fend off colds and flu which are both typical asthma triggers.

Stress Management

Managing stress levels is never easy especially in the current climate where life is difficult on so many levels. Aside from being filled with urgent tasks, financial concerns or work pressures, it's important to realise that anxieties can trigger an asthma attack so, it's important to find some time to help manage your stress levels and to recharge your batteries. Learning how to relax and to manage any worries or concerns will help you to alleviate anxiety levels which in turn can help you with your asthma management programme.

If you know that you are guilty of running from task to task at high speed in your haste to fit everything into your busy day, then it may be worth analysing your life-style, improving your time management skills and bringing some order to your life. Because stress is a common trigger, it's worth writing a to-do list but then prioritise in order of urgency. There is no point wasting time over non -essential tasks.

Learning how to switch your mind from worrying is highly beneficial and if your mind constantly flits from one thing to another, steadying your

mind with some meditation techniques might really work for you. Meditation can be used for general relaxation – de-stressing or for promoting healing -improving your lungs for example.

If you are not sure where to start, it's worth investing in some guided visualization or meditation CD's as these will start to teach you how to incorporate gentle breathing exercises within the session.

Breathing

Life is the breath and it is so important that you increase your lung capacity and start to open up the lungs as much as possible by breathing correctly. Many people breathe shallowly only using a fraction of their lungs but by regularly practicing the following breathing techniques, you should soon start to feel a difference.

- Breathe through your nose
- Ensure that you engage your diaphragm as you breathe
- Relax as you exhale
- Allow your breathing to become rhythmic

To gain the full benefits of any breathing techniques, it's important that you breathe in through your nose because this warms the air that you breathe and filters and moistens it too. If your nose is blocked through hay fever or through having blocked sinuses, then make sure you bring this to your doctor's attention so that they can provide some nasal medication to help you breathe more easily.

Learn to Breathe Correctly

Many people breathe incorrectly using the muscles in their chest instead of using their diaphragm; this can certainly take additional effort but can also create tension or fatigue. It's important to use your diaphragm and you can test whether you are by lying flat, and place one hand on your stomach and place the other hand on your chest.

Breathe in deeply through your nose and not your mouth and then shift your focus to your hands. If you are using your diaphragm, then the hand on your stomach will move as your diaphragm inflates but if you are using your chest, then this hand will move. Once you have isolated

and identified the diaphragmatic breathing, you will start to feel the difference and it will become an automatic breathing response.

You might have noticed how your breath changes when you become anxious or very tense. This type of breathing can make you feel tired and is ineffectual. Practice rhythmic breathing when you can as this will instinctively relax you during times of stress.

- Sit in a comfortable position
- Your spine should be straight and your shoulders relaxed.
- Begin to inhale through your nose but ensuring that you use your diaphragm.
- Once your lungs are full, allow your breath to flow out freely.
- Pause when your lungs are empty before beginning the in-breath again.

This rhythmic breath should allow about 10-14 breathes each minute.

Household Cleaning

You can't possibly avoid all triggers especially when they are around you constantly but you can avoid purchasing harmful everyday household products which can cause breathing problems for anyone who is asthmatic.

- Furniture Polish
- Carpet Cleaners
- Oven Cleaners

Try to avoid using spray household products and reduce the amount used each time as this may help you to avoid any symptoms.

Decorating

If you are planning to do some home-improvements, try to invest in some low-odour paints as these are a little better for anyone who has asthma. Wet paint typically gives off chemicals that can really trigger an asthma attack so be careful. When stripping wallpaper, wash it down

first as this will help to eliminate dust flying everywhere and make sure that you have ventilation.

Products to Assist Asthma Control

Bedding – whilst barrier bedding may not dramatically make a difference in terms of improving asthma related symptoms, it may still help to reduce any symptoms or irritations through house dust mites.

Ventilation- good ventilation can really assist in asthma control because it reduces humidity therefore reducing mould and house dust mites. Having a window open regularly will ensure that there is plenty of ventilation.

Ionisers – Many people feel that using an ioniser is greatly beneficial if you are suffering with asthma, they do reduce some allergens but research also indicates that they can actually irritate asthma in children for example by increasing a night-time cough.

Summary

Because asthma has no cure, it's important to learn to 'live' with it and to not fight it, rather learn how to manage it as opposed to letting the condition control you.

By following some of the pointers in this report, you will be able to self-manage your asthma, learn how to identify your own personal triggers and yet still work to improve the health of your lungs and think about how to manage stress.

Always take the holistic approach and adapt your way of life to minimise the negative impact that asthma can have.

Disclaimer: The information within this report is intended to provide a practical approach to asthma the condition and its management but is not intended to replace professional medical advice. If you have any queries regarding your asthma then we recommend you seek medical advice.