

Asthma Facts

- 1** In Australia, asthma affects one in nine children and adults; more than 2.7 million people.
- 2** Asthma affected over 334 million people globally in 2016 and that figure is expected to rise to 400 million by 2025.
- 3** Most asthma deaths occur in low and middle income countries, where underdiagnosis and undertreatment is a major problem.
- 4** Asthma is the most common chronic illness in childhood.
- 5** Only around 1 in 3 Australians with asthma have an Asthma Action Plan and many asthma hospitalisations are likely to be preventable.
- 6** Although asthma cannot be cured, new asthma treatments mean that asthma can be controlled for the majority of patients.



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Asthma



WHAT IS ASTHMA?

Asthma is a chronic lung disease that can be controlled but not cured. It is characterised by “twitchy” airways, meaning they narrow too easily and too much, and by inflammation in the airways.

Symptoms such as wheezing, chest tightness and breathlessness occur when airways narrow spontaneously, when the airway wall is thickened or after exposure to “triggers”. These triggers are different for different people, but they may be viruses (especially the common cold), allergens (house dust mites, pollens, moulds, cats and dogs), irritants including smoke or pollution, exercise, and some food and food additives.

WHAT IS THE CAUSE?

The primary cause of asthma is unknown. The disease is uncommon in non-affluent countries and the risk of developing asthma in countries like Australia is associated with environmental, lifestyle and genetic factors.

In Australia, there are around 40,000 hospital admissions each year for asthma, almost half of them children aged 0-14.

WHO GETS ASTHMA?

Asthma can affect people of all ages. Asthma is more common in boys than in girls, but more common in women than in men. Some people have symptoms in very early childhood that continue throughout their lives. Some children “grow out” of their asthma in teenage years but in about 30 percent of these cases, it reappears in adult life. Asthma can also occur for the first time in adulthood.

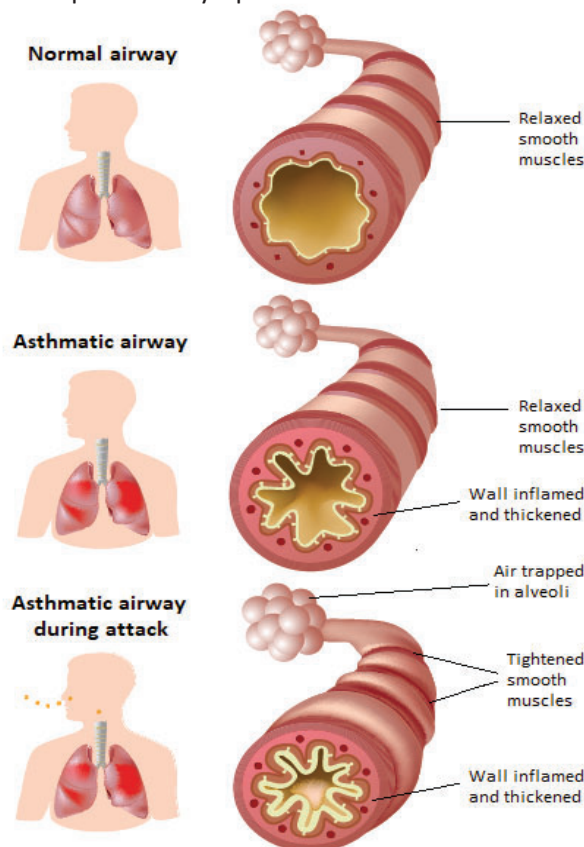
WHAT ARE THE TREATMENTS?

Although asthma cannot be cured, Australia has highly effective treatments that relieve symptoms

and control asthma for most patients, even those with severe asthma. Australian asthma guidelines recommend that almost all adults and adolescents with asthma should be taking a preventer inhaler to control symptoms and prevent attacks. Preventer treatment is taken every day or, for patients with mild asthma, as an as-needed combination reliever and preventer.

A small proportion of people do not respond well to available treatments. These people are more likely to have persisting asthma symptoms and flare-ups. Expert assessment by respiratory clinicians can assist patients and GPs in managing such asthma.

For many, proper inhaler use and good management can keep asthma symptoms under control and



stabilise the disease over time. Asthma guidelines are regularly updated and researchers are constantly looking at treatments and techniques to improve the quality of life of people with asthma.

FIVE SIMPLE QUESTIONS FOR ASSESSING ASTHMA CONTROL

Have you experienced any of the following in the past month?

- 1 Symptoms of asthma such as coughing, wheezing or shortness of breath more than twice a week?
- 2 Needing a blue reliever puffer more than two days a week?
- 3 Any symptoms during the night or on waking?
- 4 Any limitation of your activity due to asthma?

Answering YES to any of these questions indicates you may have poorly controlled asthma. Further assessment is needed from a healthcare professional.

ASTHMA AT THE WOOLCOCK

Our experts include clinicians and respiratory specialists, epidemiologists, statisticians, molecular biologists, pharmacologists, pharmacists, physiologists, microbiologists and psychologists.

We study the prevalence, risk factors and disease burden in the community, the cellular, molecular and physiological mechanisms of asthma, risk factors such as air pollution and viruses, novel diagnostic techniques, and people’s perceptions and attitudes to treatments, as well as guidelines, treatments and management strategies to improve the care of people with asthma.

Our expert clinicians at the Woolcock Clinic provide a detailed assessment for people with asthma and provide advice with the aim of optimising asthma control and prevent asthma attacks.

To find out more, go to www.woolcock.org.au/clinic.