



## Asthma UK

Asthma UK is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of the 5.2 million people in the UK with asthma.

### Asthma UK Adviceline

Ask an asthma nurse specialist  
08457 01 02 03  
asthma.org.uk/adviceline

### Asthma UK website

Read the latest independent advice and news on asthma  
asthma.org.uk

### Asthma UK publications

Request booklets, factfiles and other materials with independent, specialist information on every aspect of asthma  
020 7704 5888  
info@asthma.org.uk

### Asthma UK membership

Become a member of Asthma UK and receive *Asthma Magazine* four times a year  
020 7704 5888  
membership@asthma.org.uk

## What is asthma?

Asthma is a condition that affects the airways – the small tubes that carry air in and out of the lungs. People with asthma have airways that are almost always red and sensitive (inflamed). These airways can react badly when you have a cold, or other viral infection, or when you come into contact with an asthma trigger.

The usual symptoms of asthma are:

- coughing
- wheezing
- tightness in the chest
- shortness of breath

Not everybody will get all these symptoms. Some people experience them from time to time; a few people may experience these symptoms all the time.

## Asthma medicines

There are two main kinds of asthma medicine: relievers and preventers.

- **Relievers** are medicines that you take immediately to relieve asthma symptoms. They quickly relax the muscles surrounding the narrowed airways and help the airways open wider, making it easier to breathe again. Everyone with asthma should have a reliever inhaler. Relievers are usually blue.
- **Preventers** are medicines that control swelling and inflammation in the airways. They also stop the airways from being so sensitive to asthma triggers. The protective effect of preventer treatments builds up over time so it is important to take them every day, even if you are feeling well. Not everyone with asthma will need preventer medicine. Preventer inhalers are usually brown, red or orange. They are also available in tablet form.

*Take Control of Your Asthma* includes more information about triggers, treatments, personal asthma action plans and controlling your symptoms.

For your free copy contact Asthma UK's Supporter & Information Team, quoting reference TC05  
020 7704 5888  
info@asthma.org.uk



## Take control of your asthma

**You can take control of your asthma by knowing what medicines to take and when to take them, avoiding things that trigger your asthma and knowing what to do if your symptoms get worse.**

## Personal asthma action plans

You should be offered a written personal asthma action plan by your doctor or nurse, who should complete it in discussion with you at your asthma review. The plan will contain the information you need to keep control of your asthma, including details about your asthma medicines, how to tell when your asthma symptoms are getting worse and what you should do about it, and what to do if you have an asthma attack.

## How do I know if my asthma is getting worse?

If your symptoms are getting worse you may recognise some or all of the following:

- needing more and more reliever medicine
- waking at night with coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath or a tight chest
- having to take time off work because of your asthma
- feeling that you cannot keep up with your normal level of activity or exercise
- noticing a drop in your peak flow meter readings.

If you notice any of these signs or symptoms, make an appointment with your doctor or nurse to help you to get back in control of your asthma.

### An emergency is when any of the following happen:

- 1 Your reliever (blue) inhaler does not help
- 2 Your symptoms get worse (cough, breathless, wheeze, tight chest)
- 3 You are too breathless to speak, eat or sleep

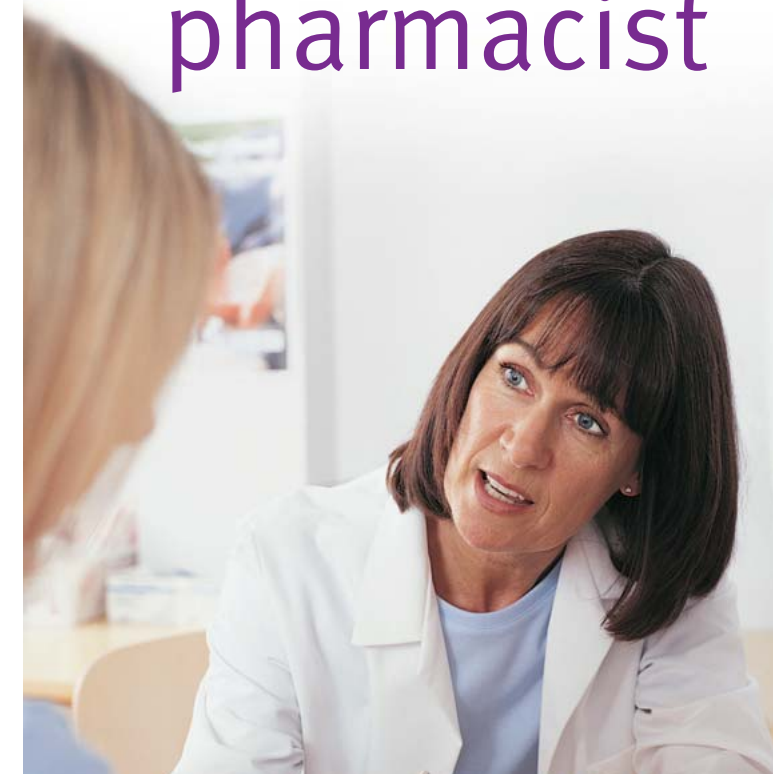
### What you must do during an attack:

- 1 Take your reliever (blue) inhaler
- 2 Sit up and loosen tight clothing
- 3 If no immediate improvement during an attack, continue to take one puff of reliever inhaler every minute for five minutes or until symptoms improve
- 4 If your symptoms do not improve in five minutes – or if you are in doubt – call 999 or a doctor urgently



# Asthma

advice from your  
pharmacist



Talk to your pharmacist about the best ways to control your asthma

# This leaflet will help you to talk to your pharmacist about the best ways to control your asthma.

## Your pharmacist can help you:

- understand your asthma
- use your medicines effectively
- monitor your asthma symptoms
- recognise when your asthma is getting worse.

You can use this leaflet to write down any questions you want to ask your pharmacist at your next medicines use review. This is an appointment to talk about your asthma medicines and any other medicines you are taking. You should have a medicines use review once a year.

## Repeat prescriptions

You can save time and trips to your doctor or nurse for repeat prescriptions by using your pharmacy's free prescription collection service. If your asthma is well controlled on your current medicines, your doctor or nurse may now be able to give you a new type of prescription that can last up to a year. If you ask, your pharmacist can look after this prescription for you and give you your medicines when you need them\*.

When you take your prescription in to your pharmacist, you can talk to them about your asthma and arrange a medicines use review.

\* Pharmacists may not be able to change your prescription, but they will be able to suggest changes to your doctor or nurse, who can discuss these with you at your asthma review.

# Talking to your pharmacist at your medicines use review

You can discuss your asthma medicines and the inhalers you are using with your pharmacist at a medicines use review. They will also check to see if you are able to use your inhaler easily. If you find it difficult to use your inhaler, or feel that it is not controlling your symptoms, talk to your pharmacist about changing to something that is easier for you to use. After your medicines use review, your pharmacist will give you a written summary of your discussion and any actions that were agreed, and send a copy to your doctor or nurse.

**REMEMBER!** Your medicines use review does not take the place of your asthma review with your doctor or nurse, which you should also have about once a year, or more frequently if you have severe asthma symptoms.

## Questions to ask your pharmacist about your asthma medicines

- What does this medicine do?
- How long will I need to use it?
- How and when should I take it?
- Am I using my inhaler correctly?
- Should I avoid any other medicines, drinks, foods or activities when I am taking this medicine?
- What are the possible risks and side effects of my asthma medicines and what should I do if they happen to me?

## Notes

Use this space to write down anything else you want to discuss with your pharmacist.

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## Your pharmacist will ask you three questions about your asthma in the last month:

Have you had difficulty sleeping because of your asthma symptoms (including cough)?

Yes  No

Have you had your usual asthma symptoms during the day (cough, wheeze, chest tightness or breathlessness)?

Yes  No

Has your asthma interfered with your usual activities (eg housework, work, school etc)?

Yes  No

## Your pharmacist may also ask:

How many times did you use your reliever inhaler in the last week?

Do you have a personal asthma action plan (see over)?

Yes  No

Do you use a peak flow meter and diary (see opposite)?

Yes  No

If you could make one thing better for your asthma what would it be?

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Date of your next medicines use review

# Other things you can talk to your pharmacist about

## Triggers

By identifying and avoiding the triggers that make your asthma symptoms worse, you can reduce unnecessary symptoms and become more in control of your asthma.

What triggers your asthma symptoms?

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## Peak flow measurements

A peak flow meter is a small plastic tube that you blow into to measure how quickly you can blow air out of your lungs. Keeping a diary of peak flow measurements can help you understand what your triggers are and how well your medicines are working. You can ask your pharmacist for further advice on using a peak flow meter and diary to help you keep your asthma under control.

## Vaccinations

Your pharmacist can give you advice about having the flu vaccination. These normally happen every autumn. You should also talk about having the pneumococcal vaccination.

## Smoking

If you smoke, your pharmacist can support and advise you about stopping. They will be able to provide you with advice and direct you to local support activities that will help you to achieve this.

**REMEMBER!** Take this leaflet when you see your pharmacist.