

HKSH Lee Tak Hong Allergy Centre

Hong Kong Sanatorium & Hospital

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Service Hours

Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri: 9:00 am - 6:00 pm

Wed: Closed all day

Sat: 9:00 am - 1:00 pm

(except in the second and fourth week of each month, the Centre will open all day Saturdays)

Closed on Sundays and Public Holidays

Consultation by Appointment



What is Asthma?



For enquiries and appointments,
please contact us

What is Asthma?

We believe that understanding asthma is the first step to feeling more in control of the condition.

Your doctor has probably given you lots of information already – but if you have recently been diagnosed, it can feel like there is a lot to take in. and if you have had asthma for some time, a reminder of the essentials is always worthwhile.

Asthma is a condition caused by inflammation of the airways that makes breathing difficult. You can get asthma at any age and symptoms include coughing, wheezing, and tightness of the chest.

Which Factors Will Trigger Asthma?

The things that bring on asthma symptoms are known as triggers. Everyone is different, but common triggers include dust, pollen, cigarette smoke, pets, changes in the weather and chest infections. Understanding what triggers your asthma can be a big step in helping to keep your symptoms under control.

How Can Triggers Affect My Asthma?

Most people have more than one trigger. When you come into contact with triggers, changes occur. These include:

- The muscles around the walls of the airways become tighter
- Airways become inflamed
- Sticky mucus (or phlegm) can build up

These changes lead to asthma symptoms and make it harder to breathe.

How Can I Stay on Top of My Asthma?

Getting the right medical support, understanding your triggers and medicines and making some changes to the way you live can help you manage your asthma more easily. Thinking ahead and being prepared make a big difference – and we are here to help you every step of the way.

What Medical Care Should I Expect?

Your care should be personal and proactive. It should include:

- Regular reviews with your doctor to help you understand your asthma and possible ways to reduce symptoms
- The opportunity to discuss and agree a Personal Asthma Action Plan with your doctor or Asthma Nurse. A Personal Asthma Action Plan is one of the most effective ways of managing your condition
- The chance to talk through your medicines, side effects, inhaler technique, triggers and monitoring your symptoms. Again, our nurses can provide expert help



What is a Personal Asthma Action Plan?

Everyone who has asthma should have a Personal Asthma Action Plan. It should contain information on:

- Your medicine including what you take and when
- How to recognize when your asthma is getting worse
- What to do when it is getting worse
- What to do if you have an attack

Why is the Plan So Important?

As one of the most effective ways of controlling asthma, using a Personal Asthma Action Plan could help you have fewer symptoms, be less likely to go into hospital because of your asthma and less likely to have an asthma attack.

Your plan should have been agreed when you were diagnosed and include your preferences and opinions.

How Can Keeping an Asthma Diary Help?

As simple as it sounds, jotting your symptoms down day-to-day can make a big difference in controlling your asthma. Use your Personal Asthma Action Plan as a starting point and then record:

- Asthma symptoms
- Peak Expiratory Flow (PEF) readings measured with your peak flow meter – ask your doctor if you do not have a peak flow meter
- When you have used medicines for a sudden asthma attack

What You Need to Know About Your Asthma Medicine

It is important for you to know what your medicines are for and what you can expect when they are used effectively.

- Your blue inhaler is a reliever inhaler. It reduces symptoms by relaxing the muscles that tighten around the airways, if you are using it three or more times a week, or your asthma is disturbing your sleep, it is time to see your doctor. You might need a different medicine or to simply improve your inhaler technique
- Your brown, red or orange inhaler is a preventer inhaler. It works over time to reduce swelling and mucus in the airways. You might not need a preventer inhaler, but if you do, it is really important to use it every day to get the full benefit
- Preventer tablets should be taken in addition to using your brown, red or orange preventer inhaler, if you have been prescribed these, they can be particularly effective if your asthma is triggered by exercise or allergies. Reliever tablets work by relaxing the muscles that surround airways
- You may be prescribed steroid tablets if your symptoms become severe to help calm inflamed airways

Using your inhaler in the right way

Inhalers are very effective as you inhale medicine straight into your lungs. That is why your technique is so important. You can check you are using your inhaler in the best way one-to-one with one of our nurses or with your doctor.

What to do if you have an asthma flare-up

If you are too breathless to speak, eat or sleep, your blue inhaler is not helping or your symptoms are getting worse, you are having an asthma flare-up. Try to keep calm and follow these steps:

1. **Take one to two puffs of your blue inhaler and try to breathe deeply and steadily.**
2. **Sit down. If you do not feel better, take two puffs (one at a time) every two minutes. You can take up to 10 puffs in total.**
3. **Call 999 if step 2 does not work or you are worried.**

Carry an asthma card so other people know what to do.

What is an Asthma Review and What Should I Expect?

If you have been living with asthma for a year or more, you have probably had an asthma review with your doctor. If you have not, it is a great opportunity to check that your asthma is being controlled as well as possible. You will be asked questions about your symptoms and how often you use your medicines, so it is a good idea to take your asthma diary along or a note of your good and bad days.

- Your breathing using a peak flow meter or spirometry
- Whether you have had any flare-ups, how many courses of steroids since your last review and if you have had any time off work because of your asthma

- How well you use your inhaler
- Make sure the way of using the inhaler and other medicines are correct since your last review
- Whether you have a Personal Asthma Action Plan and know how to use it

What else Can I Do to Help Myself?

There are positive changes you can make to the way you live that can make a big difference to your wellbeing. Everyone is different, but giving one of these ideas a go could help to minimize your symptoms.

- Eating a **healthy balanced diet** as this may help you control your asthma in the long run and being overweight can make asthma symptoms worse
- **Getting active** is great for improving your lung capacity and general wellbeing. Build things up gradually and you will soon feel the difference
- **Stopping smoking and getting others to put it out too.** Smoke can be a really big trigger, even when it is second-hand.
- **Keeping triggers at bay in your home** through regular vacuuming. Keeping your home well-ventilated, using cleaning products that are solid or liquid (rather than spray) and asking for new carpets and furniture to be aired
- **Get your Winter Flu Vaccination.** Colds, flu and chest infections can all make your asthma worse, so ask your doctor or nurse about Flu Vaccination, You can also take vitamins and stock up on cold remedies, but avoid aspirin and ibuprofen as they can cause asthma flare-ups in about 1 in 10 adults
- **Watch out for the weather.** Cold air, sudden changes in temperature, wind, heat and thunderstorms can all trigger symptoms. Use your blue inhaler before heading outdoors on cold, dry days and wear a scarf over the lower half of your face if it is cold and windy. Try to stay indoors if the weather is stormy

Breathing exercises

Breathing through your nose rather than your mouth, filling your lungs completely with air and breathing slowly and steadily can help boost your energy and reduce stress.

Go to your doctor or nurse for an asthma review at least once a year – more regularly if your symptoms are not under control.

How Can I Support a Loved One with Asthma?

If you are looking after someone with asthma, whether it is your partner, your child or a relative or friend, there are lots you can do day-to-day to support the person you are caring for.

To monitor asthma symptoms, you could:

- Help the person you are supporting keep a track of their asthma symptoms, triggers and medicines-taking
- Make sure they have a Personal Asthma Action Plan and understand it
- Go along to medical appointments (particularly the asthma annual review), if the person you are caring for does not mind. It is a good way to keep up to date and you can also talk through any worries you might have

How Can I Help with Lifestyle Changes?

There may be some changes the person you are supporting can make to the way they live. Positive changes can improve symptoms and general wellbeing. Think about:

- Helping the person you are supporting quit if they smoke
- Encouraging exercise such as walking, swimming and cycling
- Managing stress by setting priorities for the day and taking time out to relax – whether it is a walk in the park or a cup of tea and a chat

Handling asthma flare-ups

Monitoring asthma on a regular basis is the best way to pick up signs of an oncoming asthma flare-up. These can include waking during the night coughing or wheezing, difficulty breathing, needing to take time off work and using a blue inhaler.

What to do in an asthma flare-up

If the person you are supporting is too breathless to speak, eat or sleep, their blue inhaler is not helping or symptoms are getting worse, they are having an asthma flare-up. Ask them to:

- 1. Take one to two puffs of their blue inhaler and breathe deeply and steadily.**
- 2. Sit down. If they do not feel better, ask them to take two puffs (one at a time) every two minutes. They can take up to 10 puffs in total.**
- 3. Call 999 if step 2 does not work or you are worried.**

Encourage the person you are supporting to carry an asthma card so other people know what to do if you are not around.

How Can I Take Care of My Own Health?

When you are supporting someone else, it is easy to forget about your own wellbeing. Try to make sure you are eating well and getting enough sleep and time to yourself.

You also need to care for the way you feel. Try to talk to someone close to you or think about joining a support group.

There is lots of support available and things you can do to help you stay on top of your asthma. This page introduces some of them and you can read more throughout this leaflet. Remember, you can talk to our doctor or nurses in private if there is anything you would like to go through in more detail.

Adapted from a brochure produced by Boots, UK