



## Helpful foods

- Food containing the B vitamin, for example, leafy green vegetables and pulses. There is some evidence that people with asthma could be deficient in vitamins B6 and C.
- Vitamin C from citrus fruits, vitamin E from Soya beans and olive oil may strengthen the lungs' defences.
- Current research also suggests that oily fish, such as salmon, mackerel, herring and sardines, may help to protect against asthma.

This literature is produced as an acknowledgement of the life and work of Desmond and Hildergard Atherton. Desmond worked as a GP in Coventry and Hildergard was a founder Trustee of Coventry Churches Housing Association (now Touchstone Housing Association) and The ExtraCare Charitable Trust. Desmond's strength and patience towards those in his care and Hildergard's commitment and support to our charity's work have influenced the development of well-being service that is now benefiting our residents.



Learn more about  
**asthma**

take extra care of your health



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## What is Asthma?

All living creatures need to breathe. To power the process of life, we need to take in oxygen and remove a waste product from our bodies called carbon dioxide and to do this we use the lungs. The lungs are made up of airway tubes. The first one that leads from our voice box is the main windpipe called the trachea. Deep in the middle of the chest, this then divides into two tubes, the bronchus, that lead into the left and right side of the lungs. These then break down into smaller tubes and air sacks where our blood can dispose of the carbon dioxide and collect oxygen supplies.

Doctors often refer to the large or small airways which mean the trachea/main bronchus and then the smaller tubes that lead off. Asthma is a common inflammatory condition of these airways. The inflammation causes the airways to narrow very easily to a wide range of triggers.

## Symptoms of Asthma

The symptoms vary from person to person and the severity may vary at different times. Sometimes people may become anxious, sweat and have an increased pulse rate. Other symptoms include:

- A long lasting cough, often worse at night or after exercise
- Wheezing
- Whistling sound as air is expelled from the lungs (this can be very quiet and may only be heard using a stethoscope)
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty breathing out
- Tightness of the chest

In the UK - 1 in 8 children and 1 in 13 adults are affected



In severe attacks, the following symptoms may occur;

- Breathing becomes increasingly shallow and fast
- The skin may become pale and clammy.

If you should come across anyone suffering a severe asthma attack, call an ambulance. If you are prone to them, always carry your inhaler with you.

## Who gets Asthma?

More and more people are suffering from asthma, especially in the west. In the USA alone it is thought that more than 15 million people have symptoms of asthma. In the UK one in eight children and one in 13 adults are affected. Asthma can develop for the first time in adulthood and there is no upper age limit. Asthma is under-recognised in older people because there may be other conditions with similar symptoms that can mask its presence.

## Treatment

There are **two** basic kinds of treatment.

**The first** are known as relievers which relax the muscles around the airways when they constrict. This medication is usually taken from an inhaler and may include the drugs salbutamol and terbutaline.

**The second** types of medication are known as preventers and these are designed to treat the inflammation of the airway and stop the symptoms from developing. They have to be used regularly to be effective.

## How to alleviate your symptoms

To complement traditional medicine, there are a number of things you can do to improve your condition - eat local foods in season and include at least five portions of fruit and vegetables per day (preferably organic and home produced, as many exotic varieties can cause allergy related problems).

## Keeping healthy

- Your symptoms could be less severe if you are in good health - a strong immune system keeps away infections such as colds and flu that can trigger asthma attacks in some people.
- Try and sleep well; most adults need eight hours, and drink camomile tea at bedtime.
- Take plenty of exercise - even 20 minutes a day can improve your health.
- Drink alcohol in moderation - alcohol can cause serious depression, lower immunity to infections, raise blood pressure and disrupt sleep.
- Do not smoke. Cigarettes are full of poisons that can do your body nothing but harm - let alone the implications smoking has for asthma.
- Drink up to eight glasses of water per day. This helps to dilute any allergens in your system.
- Enjoy yourself, go out and see friends and have a good time. Join in activities and entertainment that can improve the quality of your leisure time.

