

ASTHMA

Asthma is a condition that affects the airways - the small tubes that carry air in and out of the lungs.

When a casualty comes into contact with something that irritates their airways (an asthma trigger) the muscles around the walls of the airways will start to tighten, go into spasm and become narrower making breathing difficult. The lining of the airway becomes inflamed; and sometimes the mucus that cleans and protects the lining of the airways builds up and gets in the way of the air that is trying to reach the lungs. Check out the asthma movie to see all this in action.

What is an asthma trigger?

An asthma trigger is anything that irritates airways. Everyone's asthma is different. Common asthma triggers include:

- Viral infections (colds or 'flu)
- Allergies (e.g. to pollen, animals, house-dust mites and some foods)
- Irritants (e.g. cold air, tobacco smoke, chemical fumes)
- Exercise

What are asthma symptoms?

Asthma symptoms can vary. You may find that your casualty:

- Coughs or wheezes, particularly during the night, after exercise or with a cold (although not all with asthma will wheeze)

- Has a cough that will not go away and keeps coming back
- Finds it difficult to breathe and feel breathless
- Complains of having a tight feeling in their chest or a sore tummy
- Feels tired, does not run around as much as usual

TREATMENT.

- Reassure and calm the casualty.
- Advise the casualty to sit down, lean slightly forward, resting on elbows on a support such as a table.
- Ensure a good supply of fresh air.
- Allow the casualty to take own medication as prescribed by a doctor.

If the symptoms persist seek medical aid.

Asthma treatments

There are two main kinds of asthma treatment that your doctor may prescribe. They are called relievers and preventers.

Relievers

Everyone with asthma should have a reliever inhaler. Relievers are treatments taken to relieve asthma symptoms. They quickly relax the muscles surrounding the narrowed airways (within 5-10 minutes), making it easier to breathe again. Reliever inhalers are usually blue.

What about side effects?

Reliever treatments are very safe and effective and have few side effects. Sometimes, high doses of reliever treatment can slightly increase the heartbeat or give mild muscle shakes. These effects are harmless and

generally wear off after a short period of time. It is not possible to overdose on reliever treatment.

Preventers

Preventers help to 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 a period of time, so it is important that you take them every day, even if you are feeling well. Preventer inhalers are usually brown, red or orange.

Preventer treatments will not relieve sudden attacks of wheezing or breathlessness.

What about side effects?

Preventer treatments usually contain corticosteroids in low doses - a copy of the steroids produced naturally in our bodies. These steroids are very safe, not addictive and are completely different to the anabolic steroids used by body builders and athletes.

Using a preventer inhaler brings a small risk of a mouth infection called thrush and hoarseness of the voice. Using a spacer can reduce the risk of this.

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