

MyHealth RCSI Handout

Rethinking Asthma

Discover the latest thinking on asthma. What works, what's new, and why it matters.

Asthma information

Asthma symptoms can have a huge impact on day-to-day life if not managed properly. We describe asthma as being “controlled” or “uncontrolled”. Controlled asthma means you have hardly any symptoms, aren't waking during the night and don't need extra puffs of your inhalers. Uncontrolled asthma is the opposite. We always want your asthma to be controlled; this means we are treating and managing it correctly.

Inhaler education

Inhalers are the main treatment for asthma for treating the inflammation, check you are on the correct inhalers with your GP or practice nurse.

- Good inhaler technique is critical to ensure the drug gets deep into the lungs
- Get your inhaler technique checked regularly (especially if asthma is getting uncontrolled)
- Monitor for unwanted side effects (i.e hoarseness, mouth thrush)
- Use a spacer device or aerochamber (wash with warm soapy water & leave to air dry)
- Asthma society have demonstration videos for all different inhaler devices
- Take your inhalers regularly as prescribed (not matter how well you feel)
- Once per day = take them the same time every 24 hours
- Twice per day: same time every 12 hours (8am and 8pm)
- Pick a time that suits your life/daily routine
- Use alarms/ phone reminders or take inhalers with an existing habit to help you remember (like brushing your teeth)

Co morbidities

Co morbidities are health conditions that people have as well as asthma, these can make your asthma worse or their symptoms can mimic uncontrolled asthma. Common co morbidities: Rhinitis (stuffy, runny nose), Reflux (heartburn) and post nasal drip. Talk to your GP, Practice nurse or pharmacist if you think you have any and for treatment options.

Symptom/ lung function monitoring

- Important to know your normal so you can recognise abnormal symptoms
- Monitor for triggers (symptoms can occur a few hours after exposure)
- Keep a symptom diary to check for any patterns
- Common triggers (animals, pollen, pollution, dust, cold air, viruses, exercise and stress)
- Asthma society have full list of triggers and ways to reduce on website

Peakflow Device (for adults & children aged 6+)

- Great at home tool for monitoring lung function / how well asthma is controlled / triggers
- Do it before taking inhalers, blast air out into device 3 times and write down the best number
- Higher the number, the better your lungs are working (each person's peakflow number will be different there isn't a one size fits all)
- Talk to your GP or practice nurse about getting one and to show you how to use it correctly
- <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/peak-flow-test/>

Asthma Action Plan

Everyone with asthma should have a personalized asthma action plan. It is an action plan of what to do and when to do it when your asthma is getting worse or more uncontrolled. Each asthma action plan has 3 zones; green, orange and red.

- **Green**; your asthma is controlled, continue your usual treatment
- **Orange**: you have more symptoms and/or your peak flow numbers are lower than normal, take extra puffs of your inhalers as written for this zone
- **Red**: you are medically unwell and you must seek medical attention; take inhalers, it also has instructions for emergency use of inhalers while you wait for help.

Put your asthma action plan on your fridge so everyone knows what to do in an emergency. It is important you understand the plan and are confident using it, if not talk to GP, practice nurse or the asthma society.

If you feel an asthma attack coming on:

- 1) Stay calm
- 2) Take your inhalers
- 3) Call for help / get medical review
- 4) If your symptoms are getting worse and you are not getting relief from your inhalers or you cannot walk or talk, or your lips or fingernails are turning blue, or you are breathing fast or using your neck muscles or the attack came on suddenly **CALL AN AMBULANCE**

Regular Asthma Review

- Get your asthma reviewed annually (when you are well ideally)
- Have your asthma reviewed within 2 weeks post asthma attack or flare up (to make sure its resolved and to check for any triggers or causes)
- Seasonal asthma; get reviewed a few months prior to bad season (can be summer or winter) to get a plan in place
- Keep up to date with vaccines; flu and pneumonia vaccines (flu vaccine for children especially)
- Highlight own preferences or goals for asthma during annual review
- Allergy testing (blood or skin) is an option to help identify triggers (not done in GP)

Asthma and overall health

- Maintain healthy diet and lifestyle
- Regular exercise (take inhalers pre-exercise & warm up for 15-20mins)

- Meditation, deep breathing techniques and stress reduction (can be beneficial alongside medical management)
- Mind your mental health