

BE WINTER WELL WITH ASTHMA



MANY PEOPLE EXPERIENCE AN INCREASE IN ASTHMA SYMPTOMS AND FIND THEIR ASTHMA HARDER TO CONTROL DURING WINTER.

Follow our asthma checklist to be winter well with asthma.

Visit your doctor for an asthma review

Visit your doctor every 6 – 12 months for an asthma review.
With your doctor:

- assess your current level of asthma control
- make sure you are on the right medicines to manage your asthma (e.g. a preventer)
- check your inhaler technique
- ensure your Asthma Action Plan is up to date
- ask any questions

Get a written Asthma Action Plan

An Asthma Action Plan is something developed with a doctor to help provide clear instructions on what to do when experiencing asthma symptoms or during an asthma flare-up and should include instructions about managing asthma alongside identified triggers.

With your doctor, develop or update your written Asthma Action Plan.

Follow a written Asthma Action Plan for:

- better controlled asthma
- fewer asthma flare-ups
- fewer days off work or school
- reduced reliever medication use
- fewer hospital visits

Take the Asthma Control Test

If you have experienced any of the following in the last four weeks it indicates your asthma may not be under control.

- daytime asthma symptoms more than 2 days per week
- need for reliever more than 2 days per week
- any limitation on activities due to asthma symptoms
- any asthma symptoms during the night or on waking

Visit asthma.org.au/asthma-control-test to get your Asthma Score.

Preventer - every day, even when well

Preventers work to reduce the inflammation in the airways. Regular use of your preventer makes the airways less sensitive, which reduces the frequency and severity of asthma symptoms (reducing the need for your reliever medication) and the risk of future flare-ups. Daily use of a preventer is key to keeping well.

Check your device technique

Up to 90% of people are thought to use their inhalers incorrectly, which means the dose of medicine isn't getting into the lungs where it's needed. Ask your doctor or pharmacist to check you are using your inhaler medication device correctly.

Learn the steps of Asthma First Aid

The asthma first aid app is your go-to tool for an asthma emergency. It covers both first aid in the event of an asthma emergency plus the ability to review each of the four first aid steps. Download the Asthma First Aid app from the App Store or Google Play.

Colds and flu - consider an annual flu vaccination

The flu and other viral infections are the most common trigger for asthma flare-ups (attacks). Colds and flu can be more serious for people with asthma, even if your asthma is mild or your symptoms are well-controlled by medication.

The best way to protect yourself from the flu and spreading it to others is annual flu vaccination. The flu virus is always changing, so it is important to have the flu vaccine every year. This will ensure you and your family are protected against the most recent flu virus strains that may be around. It is best to be vaccinated from mid-April so your body has time to protect itself and you are ready for the peak flu period, from June to September. Everyone with asthma including all family members should be vaccinated against the flu, especially people with severe asthma.



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Good winter hygiene

Stopping the spread of flu is as easy as making sure you're following three simple steps:

- 1 cough or sneeze into your elbow
- 2 wash your hands thoroughly; and
- 3 if you're really unwell, stay home

Exercise

Exercise is an important part of your overall asthma management. Asthma shouldn't stop you from being physically active, in fact people with asthma who participate in exercise training report feeling better.

- Ask your doctor for help establishing an exercise plan for this winter.
- Consider if cold, dry air or exercise trigger your asthma and discuss how to manage these triggers with your doctor.

Healthy Eating

Health eating is an important part of asthma management.

- Aim for 5 serves of vegetables and 2 serves of fruit every day. These foods are high in antioxidants and may reduce your risk of an asthma flare-up.
- Reduce your intake of processed and take-away foods, which are high in saturated fats. These foods promote inflammation and can increase your risk of poor asthma control.

Vitamin D

There is growing interest and research into the potential role of Vitamin D in asthma management. With shorter and cooler days during winter, and more time spent indoors, you may have less exposure to the sun and therefore Vitamin D production.

- Try to spend some time outdoors each day. During winter, sun exposure is best during the middle of the day.
- While limited research suggests Vitamin D may have a protective effect against asthma flare-ups, there isn't enough evidence to suggest recommending Vitamin D supplementation as part of general asthma management.
- Speak to your doctor if you are concerned about your Vitamin D levels during winter.

Indoor Air Quality

Some heating systems can be a trigger for people with asthma. Consider what triggers your asthma and how you can reduce your exposure:

- Un-flued gas heating can release chemicals such as nitrogen dioxide which can be a trigger for asthma
- Fan-forced ducted heating can collect dust, and if not cleaned will circulate dust around the home. Make sure you have your ducted heating cleaned before using it after a period of time.
- Wood fire heaters produce high levels of smoke and particulate matter (PM2.5) which can be a trigger for asthma. If you or your neighbours wood fire heater trigger your asthma, and there is not alternative heating method, considering the following ways to reduce the impact of wood heater smoke:
 - Have your flu professionally checked and cleaned before winter
 - Burn only dry, unseasoned, untreated wood
 - Get a hot fire started, using plenty of paper and small kindling
 - Don't overload your wood heater with too much wood
 - Never leave your fire to smoulder overnight, this starves the fire of oxygen, producing smoke and pollution.

Mental Health

As is the case with other chronic conditions, research shows, people with asthma are more likely to have depression or anxiety than people without asthma. Having depression or anxiety can also make it harder to manage your asthma. If you notice you are feeling down, anxious or aren't enjoying normal activities as much as usual, make sure you speak to your doctor or call Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636.

For more information on how to be winter well with asthma, call **1800 ASTHMA (1800 278 462)** and speak with an Asthma Educator or visit asthma.org.au/winter-asthma