

MEDIA RELEASE

1 September 2021

Air Nutrition on the table this Asthma Week

WESTERN AUSTRALIA: People are being encouraged to learn about Air Nutrition this Asthma Week (1-7 September) under a new campaign launched by Asthma Australia, Asthma WA and peak health and climate bodies.

“*Air Nutrition* – you are what you breathe” encourages us all to think differently about what we are breathing in and the simple steps we can take to reduce our intake of air pollution for better health.

Recent studies investigating the impact of air pollution on health indicate there is no “safe” level of long-term exposure to particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) or nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), pollutants commonly found in sources like woodfire smoke and vehicle emissions.

Asthma WA CEO Donna Rendell said breathing is something people tend to take for granted, and it is not often that people stop to think about what they are breathing in and how it could be affecting them or those around them.

“The ‘Air Nutrition’ campaign will be a great conversation starter and we hope it will also get people thinking not only about how to reduce their exposure to air pollutants but also the role they play in keeping our community safer,” Ms Rendell said.

This year alone, some communities across Western Australia have experienced high levels of air pollution (PM_{2.5}) and may be unaware of the health risk.

In Western Australia, the coastal town of Busselton reported one of the highest hourly peaks of PM_{2.5} (126.3 ug/m³) on 26 April 2021 rating as ‘POOR’ – exceeding the ‘GOOD’ hourly threshold of 25 ug/m³¹. Smoke from hazard reduction burns and weather conditions at the time were contributing factors.

For many of the 2.7 million Australians living with asthma, peaks in air pollution like this can lead to an increase in asthma symptoms –like cough and wheeze – and an increase in hospitalisations.

For the general population, exposure to air pollution has been linked to lower life expectancy, risk of premature death, and increased burden of disease.

CEO of Asthma Australia Michele Goldman encouraged people to start thinking about their *Air Nutrition* as a key part of a healthy life, especially for those with health conditions like asthma.

“This Asthma Week, we hope for everyone to start caring as much about the air they breathe as the food they eat, for their short and long-term health,” Ms Goldman said.

“You can start small, like avoid busy roads when exercising or use an extractor fan when cooking with gas to learning how to stay safe when air quality is poor. These measures can go a long way in improving your *Air Nutrition*.

“When you consistently breathe in pollutants it causes irritation and tissue damage in your lungs and even other parts of our body. Many people with asthma are sensitive to this and know when pollution is in the air, whereas people who don’t get symptoms may have no idea of the potential of its long-term impacts,” she said.

Those most at risk from air pollution include people with asthma, respiratory and heart conditions, pregnant women, the elderly and young children.

Asthma Australia Medical Advisor and Perth-based Respiratory Physician Dr John Blakey said if you care about what you drink, you should care about what you breathe.

“Australians know where to get decent coffee, or a good wine. They spend almost a billion dollars a year on bottled water,” Dr Blakey said.

“Many people are choosy about the thousand litres they’ll drink each year, but probably don’t pay much attention to the millions of litres of air they’ll breathe. If there were chemicals in tap water that caused disease, they would want to know about it.

“In contrast, we know that the chemicals and particulates in the air can cause asthma, infections, and cancer. We need to do more about that.”

There are six key steps Western Australians can take to stay protected and support each other when air quality is poor.

1. Stay connected with local resources and groups about smoke and air quality like the [Asthma Alert Facebook group](#)
2. Support your friends and family with asthma during poor air quality events. Know [Asthma First Aid](#).
3. In the workplace, be conscious of air quality and ways to keep staff protected inside and outside.
4. In schools, be very mindful of students or staff that may need support, clean air spaces and medical help when exposed to poor air quality.
5. Prepare a clean air shelter at home where you can retreat to when air quality is poor.
6. Open your home and let fresh air in when the air quality improves.

For more information on Asthma Week and *Air Nutrition*, please visit www.asthmaweek.org.au. For resources on smoke and air quality in Western Australia, please visit www.asthmawa.org.au/asthma-alert.

Asthma WA is available on (08) 9289 3600 to answer questions about asthma and COPD or patients should speak with their doctor for a review and to update their action plan.

Asthma Week 2021 is proudly presented by the Asthma Week Collaborative

Asthma Australia

Lung Foundation Australia

Asthma Foundation Northern Territory

National Asthma Council

Asthma Western Australia

Pharmacy Guild of Australia

Centre for Air Pollution, Energy and Health
Research

Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand

Centre of Excellence - Treatable Traits

University of Tasmania (Menzies)

Climate Council

Woolcock Institute of Medical Research

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About Asthma Australia

Asthma Australia is a for-purpose, consumer organisation with a history of improving the lives of people with asthma. We operate across New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory to deliver evidence-based prevention and health strategies to more than half a million people each year. Asthma Australia works in partnership with Asthma WA and the Asthma Foundation NT. We work with people with asthma, their family and friends, health professionals, researchers and governments. We find the best treatments and practices to make sure life with asthma is the best it can be.

About Asthma WA

Asthma WA is a Western Australian charity providing free education and support to the community for more than 55 years. We provide individualised education and support to Western Australians with asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and their carers, to improve health and wellbeing and decrease preventable emergency department presentations, hospitalisations and deaths. We aim to reduce the health, social and economic impacts of asthma and COPD through better management of these conditions, keeping people well in the community. We also provide education and training in group settings for GPs, practice nurses, pharmacies, schools, sporting clubs, workplaces, child-care centres and prisons and advocate on behalf of our consumers to reduce complacency and stigma.

ⁱ Data provided by the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation WA.