Busting common Asthma Myths

Most people think they know all the basics about asthma, but there’s usually a few old wives’ tales hidden in there. Check your facts!!

Asthma can be cured
FALSE!
Asthma is a treatable health condition. Despite great advances in treatments over the years, unfortunately we still don’t have a cure. However, with appropriate diagnosis and good management, just about everyone with asthma can lead normal, active lives.

Inhaled steroids are dangerous and addictive
FALSE!
Inhaled steroids are preventer medications, and are the best way to keep moderate or severe asthma under control. Some people get them mixed up with anabolic steroids that you hear about in sports, but they are very different. Inhaled steroids are a safe and very effective, non-addictive medication that is usually the best way for you to avoid asthma attacks.

It’s normal to puff on a blue reliever at least once a day
NO WAY!
If a child is regularly using their blue reliever to deal with asthma symptoms three times or more a week, then their asthma is not under control. They need to see their GP and talk about what’s going on. If the child is on a preventer medication, then they need to make sure they’re taking it every day. Needing to use reliever medication frequently is a strong indicator that they could soon have an asthma attack, so do something about it NOW.

Asthma can improve by moving to the country or to the coast
IT DEPENDS:
Because asthma is such an individual disease, some people find the coast is better, while others have fewer problems in the country. Most triggers can unfortunately be found wherever you go. A number of people also find that while a change in climate may improve their symptoms for some time, they then develop allergies to other things in their new environment.

You shouldn’t have pets if you have asthma
RUBBISH!
Lots of people with asthma have pets, of all different types. Some people definitely have problems with pets as triggers, or are allergic to particular animals; with the furry cats and dogs most often causing issues. Depending on the animal, allergens can be found in the saliva, sweat, hair, urine or dead skin. Sometimes the reaction only occurs when you get really close to the animal so it depends on your own response. If all else fails, there’s always fish or lizards!

Children will usually outgrow asthma
UNLIKELY:
Asthma is a long term health condition in which the lungs over-react to certain things. This overreaction never entirely disappears, but in some people it becomes so minor that there aren’t any more symptoms. Some children have asthma symptoms that improve or disappear during adolescence. Those with more severe or persistent asthma tend to remain much the same as they become adults. Even when symptoms disappear completely, there is a chance they may return later on in life, particularly with infections or exercise, or major changes such as pregnancy.
Ask the expert - is there a link between asthma and air quality?

One of Australia’s leading respiratory specialists, Professor Connie Katelaris, discusses the links between asthma and air quality.

Watch now

Milk - good or bad for asthma?

Dairy products like milk are promoted as part of a healthy diet in supporting growth and calcium consumption, but is it advisable to restrict dairy products to help asthma?

It’s actually pretty unusual for food to be a trigger for asthma, so people with asthma aren’t generally put on a restrictive diet. There are some food additives or preservatives that people have reported as triggering asthma symptoms, such as sulphites (common food and drug preservatives; additive numbers 220-228), tartrazine (yellow dye), benzoates, monosodium glutamate (known as MSG) and salicylates, but there isn’t much research to back this up.

However many people with asthma also have allergies, and allergic reactions to food can cause symptoms similar to asthma. It is known that around 2% of babies are allergic to cow’s milk. In this minority, dairy products may result in an allergic reaction with symptoms such as hives and vomiting, as well as asthma-type symptoms. If this is suspected, it is vital for parents to have a correct diagnosis for children with the condition, using skin testing or blood tests to determine the presence of allergy (IgE) antibodies to milk.

Intolerance is something different. For those with lactose or milk intolerance, drinking milk may cause gastrointestinal symptoms such as diarrhoea and vomiting; but will not exacerbate asthma symptoms.

Due to the texture of the milk, some people feel that when they drink it, their throat is coated with thick mucus and this in turn causes runny nose and coughing. This can also be caused by fluids of similar thickness. Cold milk may cause a cough in some people, but this is more likely to do with the temperature of the milk.

Could milk actually help asthma?

A recent study published in the medical journal Thorax suggests that full fat milk and butter might even be the key to preventing asthma. In a study of 3000 three year olds, it was found that those who consumed most dairy products could be up to 4 times less likely to develop asthma symptoms. This may be attributed to the fatty acids found in full fat dairy products.

Dr John Harvey, of the British Thoracic Society, said: “We have always known milk is important in the development of children’s bones and teeth. It now seems that it would play a role in reducing asthma in small children. More research is needed. Moderation is the key since butter and cream need to be eaten as part of a healthy balanced diet.”

To find out more contact Asthma Foundation NSW
1800 ASTHMA | asthmafoundation.org.au

Term Two 2013

Supported by the Australian Government
PJ Day is here!

Register Today and Receive your Free Resource Kit

Did you know asthma is the leading cause of hospital admissions in children? We find this fact startling and we are determined to do something about it and your school can help!

That’s why here at Asthma Foundation NSW we are really excited about PJ Day this May. It gives us an opportunity to raise much needed funds to go towards asthma education and research. We already have our favourite pairs of PJs picked out and all our staff and volunteers will be involved.

It’s not too late for your school to register and take part. When you register you will receive a pack of goodies including posters, postcards and the ability to set up your own fundraising page online.

As you probably aware, asthma can affect the quality of life of the whole family and can be both mentally and physically exhausting. At Asthma Foundation NSW, we are passionate about helping people with asthma enjoy their life to the full without having to miss out on the activities they enjoy.

By participating in PJ Day your school, preschool or day care will be helping to raise funds to provide asthma education and support as well contributing to vital asthma research. You will be making a real difference to the lives of people with asthma and their families.

Ways to take part

• Get your school to wear their PJs or slippers and ask for a gold coin donation
• Ask parents to donate/bake a cake and hold a cake stall or morning tea fundraiser
• Sponsor the principal or a teacher to wear their PJs for the day!

Visit our website for more ways to take part or if you have a great fundraising idea then please let us know.

Get involved - it’s easy!

To find out more and get involved in PJ Day simply visit our website or email Donna Taanman at dtaanman@asthmafoundation.org.au or call 02 9906 3233.
Young people at the National Asthma Conference

On 19 and 20 March Asthma Australia’s conference, Tackling Asthma in Australia — the Next 5 Years, was held in Canberra.

Two ACT young people provided a ‘welcome to the future’ for the attendees.

Hayley, a secondary school student, told the audience about her asthma and how her school was involved in a project to help the students to know how to help a friend in case of an asthma attack. Eddie, an active sportsperson, also told the conference about his asthma, how he managed this to play top level sport, and about his involvement in a day of filming at the Australian Institute of Sport for Asthma Australia.

Eddie finished the welcome with, “I’m proud to be involved with Asthma Australia and the Asthma Foundation here in ACT, and helping to get important messages about asthma and self-management to teenagers and young adults around Australia. Asthma Australia has lots of plans to work more closely with people like me. This is really important and we thank you for giving us the chance to have our say.”

The winning poster from the competition held at the end of last year, by a student at Woodleigh School in Victoria, was framed and provided to all conference presenters.

New Triggers Booklet

This booklet was launched at the conference and informs people with asthma and their caregivers about how to recognise their asthma triggers and what can be done to avoid them.

Asthma triggers could be something that people with asthma:

- Breathe in (smoke, cool air)
- Catch (cold, flu)
- Feel (emotions, stress)
- Do (exercise)
- Eat or drink, take (medications)

The booklet is available online at the Asthma Australia website via Latest News. This may help you understand about your student’s asthma triggers, or to inform parents and carers.

Exercise: a trigger not to avoid

Students with asthma should participate in sports and other physical activity as a component of a healthy lifestyle.

When a student’s asthma interferes with physical activity, they may need to review their use of preventer medication or seek their doctor’s advice about asthma medication they use prior to exercise.

The images here show Petrina Price, an Olympic high jump athlete, and Maddie, Issy and Eddie, active young people who manage their asthma and participate in a variety of sports, at the Australian Institute of Sport during filming for Asthma Australia. View the promo

Exercise: a trigger not to avoid