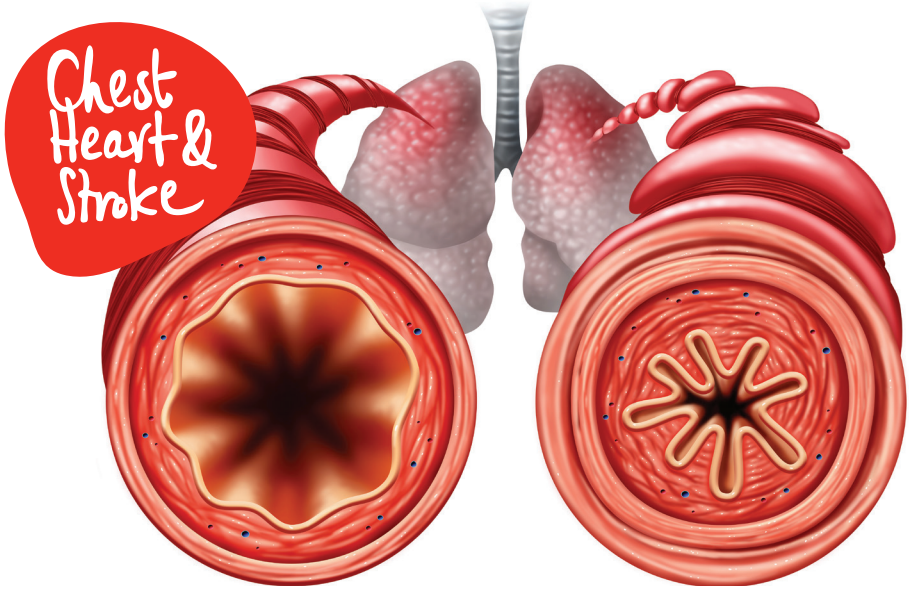


Asthma

How do your lungs work?

In order to survive your body needs oxygen from the air you breathe. The lungs are designed to absorb oxygen from the air and transfer it into the bloodstream and then to remove waste gases, such as carbon dioxide.

When you breathe air in, through your nose or mouth, it travels down the back of your throat (pharynx), passes through your voice box (larynx), and into your windpipe (trachea). The trachea divides into two passages - the right and left bronchi. One bronchial tube leads to the left lung, the other to the right lung.

The respiratory system has built–in methods to prevent harmful substances from entering your lungs.

Asthma

Asthma is caused by swelling and narrowing of the breathing tubes. This makes the tubes highly sensitive, so they temporarily narrow. This typically occurs after an exposure to a trigger but sometimes can seem to occur for no obvious reason. Common asthma triggers include:

- **allergies for example house dust, mites, animal fur or pollen**
- **smoke, pollution and cold air**
- **exercise**
- **infections like colds or flu**

Identifying and avoiding your asthma triggers can help you keep your symptoms under control.

Signs and Symptoms

The main symptoms of asthma are:

- **a whistling sound when breathing (wheezing) which occurs mainly when breathing out**
- **breathlessness**
- **a tight chest**
- **coughing**

The symptoms can get temporarily worse and make breathing very difficult. This is known as an asthma attack.

Treatments for Asthma

There is currently no cure, but asthma is usually treated by using an inhaler, a small device that lets you breathe in medicines that can help keep your symptoms under control. The main types of inhalers are:

- **reliever inhalers** – used when needed to quickly relieve asthma symptoms for a short time. These can widen narrowed airways.
- **preventer inhalers** – used every day to prevent asthma symptoms occurring by dampening the airways, inflammation and making the airways less sensitive or twitchy.

Although asthma can normally be kept under control, it's still a serious condition that can cause problems if a treatment plan is not followed and your symptoms get worse. Badly controlled asthma can cause problems such as:

- feeling tired all the time
- underperformance at, or absence from, work or school
- stress, anxiety or depression
- disruption of your work and leisure because of unplanned visits to a GP or hospital
- lung infections (pneumonia)
- delays in growth or puberty in children

There's also a risk of severe asthma attacks, which can be life threatening.

For general health and wellbeing, follow the lifestyle advice below:

1. **Eat a balanced diet**
2. **Keep physically active**
3. **Maintain a healthy weight**
4. **Stop smoking**
5. **Moderate your alcohol intake**
6. **Manage your stress levels**
7. **Get enough sleep**

Further Support

Living with a chest, heart or stroke condition can be challenging, not just for the person affected but for the wider family and carers as well. Our Care Services team at NICHS offers a range of information, support and activities to help people live with their condition. These services are free and can enable people to feel more in control, improve their confidence and know where else to go to for help. For more information, please visit our website **www.nichs.org.uk**

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