

## Asthma

- Asthma is a chronic lung disease characterised by inflammation of the airways
- Asthma is extremely common, affecting over 2 million Australians
- Approximately 400 Australians died from asthma in 2002
- People with asthma tend to suffer from episodes of wheeze, cough and shortness of breath due to narrowing of the airways
- In almost all asthmatics, asthma can be well controlled with regular 'preventer' inhalers that control the inflammation within the airways

### ***What causes asthma?***

- The cause of asthma is unknown, although it is more common in people who have close relatives with asthma
- There are several theories regarding the possibility that asthma is related to the development of allergies to certain factors during early life, and research evaluating this is continuing

### ***Can asthma be cured?***

- Asthma cannot actually be cured, although asthma will recede in some people
- There is very effective inhaled therapy for asthma that will cure the symptoms and very effectively control the disease in the vast majority of people

### ***What are the aims of asthma treatment***

- The principles of asthma management involve controlling airway obstruction with preventer and reliever medications
- For the majority of patients with asthma, controlling the inflammation of the airways with the use of inhaled corticosteroids (preventers) is the most important part of therapy
- However, the exact medications used to treat asthma will vary in different people depending upon the severity of asthma, with treatment aimed at achieving ***good asthma control***

### ***What is good asthma control?***

- Good asthma control is indicated by:
  1. Participation in activities, including exercise, without asthma symptoms
  2. Sleeping through the night without asthma symptoms
  3. Requiring no, or very little, reliever use for asthma symptoms
  4. Maintaining your best lung function, with little airway obstruction

### ***What medications are used to treat asthma?***

- **“Preventer”** medications = Inhaled corticosteroids (Budesonide / ‘Pulmicort’, Fluticasone / ‘flixotide’, beclomethasone / ‘Qvar’)
  - new inhalers also include a combination of these inhaled corticosteroids along with long-acting bronchodilators (e.g. fluticasone+salmeterol / ‘Seretide’, budesonide+formoterol / ‘Symbicort’)
  - these inhalers form the most important part of asthma control for the majority of people, and are taken every day of the year to keep asthma controlled
  - Asthma can usually be controlled with quite low doses of these medications
  - it is much easier to control asthma than it is to treat uncontrolled asthma
- **“Reliever”** medications = bronchodilators (salbutamol / ‘ventolin’ or ‘airomir’ or ‘asmol’, terbutaline / ‘bricanyl’)
  - these inhalers are only used if patients have symptoms
  - if these inhalers are being used frequently, it suggests that asthma control is poor
  - if reliever inhalers are needed more than twice a day, you should see your doctor

### ***What is an asthma action plan?***

(an example Asthma management plan is available in the links at the left)

- Every patient with asthma should have an asthma action plan in order to prevent and deal with asthma ‘attacks’
- If you do not have an asthma management plan, you should speak to your doctor about developing one
- An asthma management plan involves making slight alterations to your asthma treatment whenever warning signs develop that suggest your asthma control may be deteriorating
- These signs include:
  - Developing asthma symptoms at night (cough, wheeze, tightness)
  - Needing to use extra reliever treatment because of asthma symptoms
  - Developing an upper respiratory tract infection or ‘cold’

### ***Remember:***

- Asthma is very common in Australia, and each year people still die from poorly controlled asthma
- Asthma can be very effectively controlled in almost all asthmatics with low doses of ‘preventer’ therapy – the secret to good asthma control is taking preventer inhalers every day.....every week.....every month
- People with well controlled asthma do not need to use much reliever therapy – if you are needing reliever medications more than twice a day, your asthma is probably not well controlled
- Make sure you have an asthma management plan to maintain asthma control