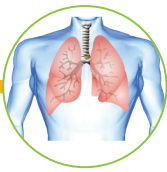
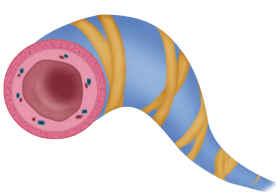


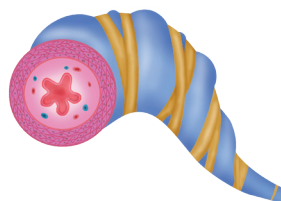
# ASTHMA MYTHS



Asthma is a long term illness of the lungs that causes the airways to become inflamed and produce lots of mucus. Viral infections, cold air, allergens, exercise, and smoke make the airways “twitchy”; they close easily causing asthma attacks with coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath (see what is asthma). Between attacks the airways are inflamed (see what is an allergy).



NORMAL BRONCHUS



ASTHMA BRONCHUS

Although asthma can be controlled (see how to control asthma) by using regular controller medication, many patients continue to have poor control causing troublesome symptoms like coughing and shortness of breath, problems effecting daily life at school or work and visits to emergency rooms.

Most people’s problems with poor control are not because they’ve been prescribed the wrong medications, but because they are not taking them as often as they should, are not using them the best way possible, or are continuing to expose themselves to trigger factors. This is often because they have listened to “old wives tales” about asthma. Here are some of the facts to counter those myths.

## Myth: It’s better to ‘tough it out’ without taking asthma medication.

The lungs do not get stronger or become better able to deal with asthma if a person tries to work through an attack without medication. In fact, the lung inflammation that goes along with an attack (see what is asthma) can cause permanent damage to the lungs. Always use medication according to the Asthma Action Plan. If you have questions, talk with your health care provider.

### ASTHMA ACTION PLAN FOR:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

allergy foundation south africa  
<http://www.allergyfoundation.co.za>

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**GREEN ZONE - GO**

This is where you want to be most of the time. Your asthma is under control when:

- No cough or wheeze
- Can play games and sport normally
- No sleep disturbance
- Using reliever less than 3 times a week

**AND Peak flows are greater than 80%**

**ACTION: TAKE NORMAL MEDICINES**

- Controller  
Strength \_\_\_\_\_  
Your device is \_\_\_\_\_  
Take \_\_\_\_\_ puffs \_\_\_\_\_ every day
- Other Medicines  
Medicine \_\_\_\_\_  
Dose \_\_\_\_\_  
When \_\_\_\_\_
- Reliever  
Device \_\_\_\_\_  
Take \_\_\_\_\_ puff(s) as required  
And if necessary take \_\_\_\_\_ puffs 10-15 minutes before sport or activity

**ORANGE ZONE - CAUTION**

Your asthma is not under control/getting worse when:

- Cough, wheeze or tight chest
- Walking at night with asthma symptoms
- Need to use the reliever inhaler more than 3 times a week
- Problems playing or doing sport

**OR Peak flow recordings are between (50%) and (80%)**

**ACTION**

Increase the reliever inhaler to \_\_\_\_\_ puffs four times per day until you are back in the green zone.

**Continue** to take your controller inhaler as normal to prevent your symptoms.

**Other action:** \_\_\_\_\_

If there is no improvement, medication may need to be changed, so make an appointment to see your Doctor or Asthma Nurse.

Follow the advice in this plan and fill in a symptom and medication diary every day, and take it with you to the Dr or Asthma Nurse.

**RED ZONE - RED ALERT!**

Your asthma is critical/dangerous when:

- Breathing is hard and fast
- Can't talk easily or feed easily
- Severe shortness of breath
- The reliever pump is not helping

**OR Peak flow is below 50%**

Follow the Red Zone Action and see a doctor immediately or go to the closest emergency room.

**ACTION**

**Call an ambulance or go to the doctor NOW**, even if symptoms get better!

**Take 1 dose/puff of reliever every minute for 10 minutes.** Use a spacer if you have one. **Repeat this** if there is no improvement, as often as you need.

**While waiting:** Give one puff of reliever every minute for 10 minutes using a spacer if you have one.

- If you have steroid tablets or syrup give them now. Your dose is \_\_\_\_\_
- Keep calm.
- Sit up to help breathe and loosen clothing.

Doctor's Phone No: \_\_\_\_\_  
Hospital Phone No: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Normal Peak flow: \_\_\_\_\_  
Best Peak flow: \_\_\_\_\_

# HOW TO CONTROL ASTHMA

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## **Myth: Asthma pumps are dangerous.**

The corticosteroids in controller medicines (see how to control asthma) used to control asthma are not the same as the often illegal steroids used by some athletes, and have no effect on muscles or athletic performance. They are related to the steroids found in creams to reduce itch or inflammation of the skin.

Many scientific studies have shown asthma medications to be safe over long periods of use.

Reliever medication used a lot can cause your heart to beat faster. Asthma pumps do not weaken the heart. Asthma pumps are not addictive. But if you don't take your controller regularly and just rely on a reliever, you may find your reliever pump starts to work less.

## **Myth: If my asthma medication is not helping, I need to increase my dose.**

Asthma devices are difficult to use. Even with the best technique possible, only a small amount of the medication gets into the lungs. Most problems with asthma are not because the person has been prescribed the wrong medication but because they are not using them as often as they should or with the best possible technique. Your controller medication should be taken every day, whether you have symptoms or not, to reduce the inflammation in the lungs. If you do this properly, symptoms will go away and you won't have to use your reliever pump at all.

It is really hard to use inhaled asthma medicines with the best possible technique. There are lots of different devices and there are different techniques for each one! Also, as children get older, the device they use or the techniques they are using for their pumps might change. That's why it is important to bring all your pumps and medicines with you to your every visit ....so your doctor, nurse or pharmacist can explain to you what type of medicine it is, and check whether your technique in using it is good enough (see how to use your asthma device).

## **Myth: Sports and physical activity make asthma worse.**

Physical activity, and the conditioning that comes with it, should be part of everyone's life, including those with asthma. Asthma should not interfere with physical activity. If you are having problems with exercise it means your asthma is not well controlled and you will need to see your doctor to check you are taking the right medications, every day and with the best possible technique.

Some famous South African sports-people have asthma, such as Schalk Burger and Roland Schoeman.

# HOW TO CONTROL ASTHMA

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## **Myth: Everybody's asthma is the same.**

Asthma severity can vary greatly from one person to another. Treatment for one person may not be the same as another. Talk with your health care provider or refer to your Asthma Action Plan, and never share asthma medications with someone else.

## **Myth: Asthma is an emotional illness.**

Asthma is caused by inflammation and constriction in the lungs. It is stressful to have an asthma attack, but emotions do not cause asthma.

## **Myth: Asthma can be treated with alternative medicines.**

Asthma is caused by inflammation in the lungs. No alternative, folk or traditional medicines can treat inflammation. If you do feel that alternative medicines help your asthma, keep on using your controller pumps as well, to make sure that the inflammation doesn't come back.



A medical specialist with a special interest and skill in allergy might be able to help. See the list of health professionals with skills in allergy on the AFSA website.