

Asthma and anaphylaxis

What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic inflammatory disease of the airways. People with asthma experience a narrowing of the airways due to inflammation in the lungs, which blocks the flow of air into and out of the lungs. Asthma is most easily recognised by the following symptoms:

- Wheezing (noise when breathing out).
- Persistent cough, especially at night.
- Difficulty breathing and shortness of breath.
- Tightness and heaviness in the chest.
- Wheezing or coughing with exercise (exercise induced asthma).

Asthma and anaphylaxis

- Symptoms such as wheezing, difficulty breathing and persistent cough can also present with anaphylaxis and sometimes you may be unsure if it is asthma or anaphylaxis
- Asthma, food allergy and high risk of anaphylaxis (severe allergic reaction) frequently occur together.
- Asthma increases the risk of fatal anaphylaxis and therefore it is important to manage your asthma well as part of anaphylaxis risk management. If you are using your reliever medication frequently you should make an appointment with your GP to improve your asthma management.
- If you have sudden onset of breathing difficulty soon after an insect sting or ingestion of food or medication you may be experiencing anaphylaxis, not just asthma.
- It is important to note that the progression and severity of allergic reactions can be unpredictable. Most food related allergic reactions start within 20 minutes or up to 2 hours after ingestion. Mild to moderate symptoms of allergy may or may not present before symptoms of anaphylaxis.

If you have asthma, have been prescribed an adrenaline (epinephrine) autoinjector (e.g. EpiPen) AND suddenly start to have difficulty breathing:

- Sit down and do NOT stand or walk.
- Use your adrenaline autoinjector FIRST, then use your asthma reliever medication
- Seek urgent medical attention - phone ambulance - 000 (Australia) or 111 (New Zealand)
- Follow your ASCIA Action Plan for Anaphylaxis, then continue asthma first aid.
- **If in doubt, use your adrenaline autoinjector.**

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Disclaimer

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