

Asthma winter checklist

Colds and flu can hit hard if you have asthma. In fact, the common cold is behind around 4 out of 5 bad asthma attacks. Make sure your lungs are in the best possible shape for winter by following these steps



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Disclaimer: It is important to note that information contained in this fact sheet is not intended to replace professional medical advice. Any questions regarding a medical diagnosis or treatment should be directed to a medical practitioner.

1. Get your lungs checked

See your doctor for an asthma review before the cold and flu season arrives. You can check the health of your lungs and work out if you need to make any changes to your asthma medicines so you stay well over winter.

2. Follow your asthma action plan

Together with your doctor, develop or update your personal written asthma action plan with instructions on how to manage your asthma over winter. A written asthma action plan helps you recognise worsening asthma and tells you what to do in response. Acting quickly can help prevent a mild flare-up from developing into a serious attack.

3. Use your medications wisely

Tell your doctor if you have been using your reliever puffer more than twice a week or are having asthma symptoms at night. These are important signs that your lungs may not be in the best condition for winter colds and flu. If you have been prescribed a preventer medication make sure you use it - even if you feel well.

4. Check your inhaler technique

All adults and children need careful training from a doctor, nurse, asthma educator or pharmacist to use inhaled medicines correctly. Proper use of inhalers helps medicines work properly, can reduce the risk of side-effects and is essential for good asthma management. The instructions are different for each type of inhaler device.

5. Take extra care if you are over 65

- Colds and flu can hit extra hard in seniors with asthma.
- Ask your doctor about vaccination for influenza and/or pneumonia
- Don't ignore symptoms or put off seeking help - prompt action can help keep you out of hospital
- Make sure you're taking your medicines the best way - ask your pharmacist or practice nurse to check you're using your puffer or inhaler correctly
- If you're still using a nebuliser, speak to your doctor about making the switch to a puffer and spacer - this works just as well for treating asthma symptoms (including during an asthma attack) and is easier, faster and cheaper to use than a nebuliser

6. Take preventative action

- Keep warm if cold air triggers your asthma
- Control germs by washing your hands
- Avoid contact with anyone who's sick
- Ask your doctor about having the flu vaccination

If you get sick...

Follow your written asthma action plan - if you don't have one, contact your doctor to check what you should do.

- Get lots of rest and take care of yourself
- Stay home - try to avoid infecting others
- Seek medical help straight away if your symptoms are severe or rapidly getting worse

Antibiotics are not recommended for treating viral infections like the common cold.

Need more information?

Visit National Asthma Council Australia's website nationalasthma.org.au