

# Acute asthma exacerbation and what to expect after discharge

## Introduction

This leaflet gives you information about asthma, exacerbations of asthma and how you can help to reduce the chances of another attack.

## What is asthma?

Asthma is a chronic lung condition due to inflammation within the lungs. This causes airway swelling and muscle spasm leading to symptoms such as shortness of breath, cough and wheeze.

For many people, their asthma is well controlled with inhalers. However, there can be periods where asthma gets worse – this is called an exacerbation. Asthma exacerbations can happen for a number of reasons including cold weather, exercise, allergies or infection.

Often exacerbations can be managed at home with increased use of your inhalers and a short course of steroids.

If very severe, acute asthma exacerbations can be life-threatening and need urgent treatment in hospital. Treatment may include oxygen and nebulisers. If the cause of the exacerbation is thought to be a bacterial infection, you may require a course of antibiotics.

More information about asthma can be found at:

### Asthma UK

Website: [www.asthma.org.uk/advice](http://www.asthma.org.uk/advice)

This website has useful advice regarding a wide range of issues related to asthma.

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Information**

## What to do after an asthma attack

Your symptoms should start to improve 2 to 3 days after starting treatment.

There are 3 things you should do to help stay well and reduce the chances of another attack:

1. Book an urgent review appointment with your GP or asthma nurse.
  - You should be seen within 48 hours if you have been treated in hospital or by the paramedics at home.
2. Continue taking your medications as prescribed.
  - Keep taking your preventer inhaler.
  - Complete the short course of steroids (the dose of steroid may need to be reduced slowly if you have had needed these recently, or are taking them long term).
3. Give yourself time to recover.
  - Do not go back to work until you feel well.
  - Try not to do too much at home – ask for help if you need it.

**If your breathlessness or wheeze is getting worse, you should:**

- **Sit up straight**
- **Take your blue inhaler:**
  - **Take one puff every 30 to 60 seconds up to 10 puffs.**
  - **Use a spacer device if you have one.**

**If you are getting worse, or you are no better, despite using 10 puffs of your blue inhaler, and waiting for 5 minutes call 999 straight away.**

**You can use another 10 puffs of your blue inhaler after 10 minutes while waiting for the ambulance to arrive.**

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## Follow up arrangements

Before you leave hospital, your asthma management should be discussed with you by one of the Respiratory Team and you should be given a written asthma management plan. If this has not happened and you would be interested in this, please let the nurse or doctor looking after you know before you leave the hospital.

You should have a review of your asthma control with your GP or asthma nurse within 48 hours of discharge to make sure that your condition is improving as we would expect.

To make sure that you do have a symptom review of your asthma, we will arrange for a telephone consultation from the hospital 48 hours after discharge, but you should still try to make an appointment with your GP or asthma nurse in addition to this.

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