

# Is allergy triggering you or your child's asthma?

Asthma can be life threatening. Don't wait for an emergency before seeking help.





## What is allergic asthma?

**> Allergic asthma is asthma triggered by an allergen or allergens (it is also known as respiratory allergy).**

An allergen is typically a harmless substance, such as pollen, food, house dust mite, mould, or even pets and other animals. Whilst in most people these substances (allergens) pose no problem, in an allergic individual their immune system identifies them as a 'threat' and produces an inappropriate response. This is what is called an allergic reaction, in which asthma can be a symptom. Allergies can trigger asthma exacerbations (these are periods when asthma worsens) - in up to 90% of children and 60% of adults with asthma<sup>1,2</sup>.

### **Why is it important to find out if you or your child has allergic asthma?**

People with asthma that is triggered by allergens (allergic asthma) may be suffering additional symptoms, even though they are taking their asthma medication as prescribed. It may be that there is overuse of a rescue/reliever inhaler on a regular basis and they may even have been to A&E or admitted to hospital. Sometimes it is only at certain times of the year, such as when pollen counts are high.

Identifying your specific allergic triggers and taking steps to reduce your exposure to them, can reduce your overall allergen load and may improve your symptoms.

Many people are unaware of the link between allergy and asthma. This can often lead to a long delay in getting allergy considered in the diagnosis and an appropriate management plan.

**'If you can find out what the triggers are for your asthma, you may be able to reduce your exposure, which could help you to reduce your symptoms.'**

# What symptoms should I look out for?

Many people who have allergic asthma have chest and nasal symptoms that they do not connect directly to their asthma, including:

## Chest Symptoms

- Cough, but no temperature or illness
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing/tight chest
- Waking in the night with a cough

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## Nasal Symptoms

- Stuffy blocked nose
- Sneezing
- Runny nose with clear fluid
- Itchy eyes

*Consult your GP or asthma nurse if you are experiencing any of these symptoms which may suggest your asthma is triggered by allergens.*

**There are 5.4 million people with asthma in the UK. That's one in every 11 people.<sup>4</sup>**



# Preparing for your appointment

## > Is allergy triggering my asthma?

Please **tick** all statements that apply to you or your child. You can tear off this panel and take it with you to an appointment with your GP or asthma nurse to discuss further.

### 1. Do you have a family history of any of the following? (Tick all that apply)

- Asthma  Eczema  Hay fever   
Allergies  No family history of allergy
- 

### 2. Have you or your child ever been diagnosed with any other allergic condition?

- Yes  No
- 

### 3. Are you or your child's asthma symptoms worse in any of the following situations? (Tick all that apply)

- a. Around animals (cats/dogs/rabbits/birds etc)   
b. After eating certain foods (raw or cooked)   
c. In dusty or damp places   
d. First thing in the morning or at night   
e. After taking medication e.g. Aspirin   
f. During the pollen season (early Spring/Summer)   
g. After a thunderstorm   
h. In Autumn/Winter when the heating is turned on
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### 4. Do you or your child have a runny or blocked nose and are sneezing when you don't have a cold?

- Yes  No
- 

### 5. Do you or your child ever feel fluid (mucous) dripping down the back of your throat from your nose?

- Yes  No

# How is allergic asthma diagnosed?

There are two validated and recommended tests to detect allergens:

1. A blood test to identify allergic antibodies specifically for the allergen (called Specific IgE).
2. A skin prick test which can also detect allergens.

However, a clinical history of the individual is vitally important so that suspected allergens can be identified for testing via a blood or skin prick test to confirm diagnosis.

## Managing allergic asthma

- 1 Avoid or reduce exposure to your triggers.**  
Allergy UK has Factsheets on most allergic triggers as well as online tools that you can download free from our website: [www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org) or call the Allergy UK Helpline on **01322 619 898** for more information and guidance.
- 2 Make sure you take your medication as prescribed, even if you feel well.**  
Do not stop your medication or make any changes without consultation with your GP<sup>3</sup>.
- 3 Follow a Personal Asthma Action Plan (PAAP).**  
Make sure you have an annual review with your asthma nurse or GP<sup>2</sup>.
- 4 Discuss with your GP whether a referral to an allergy clinic for specialist treatment is needed.**

### References:

<sup>1</sup> Allen-Ramey, et al. J Am Board Fam Pract 2005; 18(5); 434-439.

<sup>2</sup> Host A, Halcken S Allergy 2000; 55; 600-608.

<sup>3</sup> Why asthma still kills. The National Review of Asthma Deaths (NRAD). Royal College of Physicians. May 2014. [http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/sites/default/files/why\\_asthma\\_still\\_kills\\_executive\\_summary.pdf](http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/sites/default/files/why_asthma_still_kills_executive_summary.pdf). Accessed May 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Asthma Facts and Statistics, [www.asthma.org.uk](http://www.asthma.org.uk)

# What do I do next?

Go to Allergy UK's website [www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org) where you will find an online allergic asthma tool. This has been designed to identify the possible connection between asthma and allergens. As well as some simple questions, you will find other online tools and information. Together, these may indicate whether or not allergens are a likely trigger for your asthma. You will be able to download the results so that you can take the information to your GP or asthma nurse for further discussion.

If a food has triggered your asthma it is important not to eat that food again, until you have seen your GP for further advice.



## For more help, contact the Allergy UK Helpline:

9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

**01322 619 898**    [www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org)



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@allergyUK1

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The content of this leaflet was written and developed by Allergy UK. It is not medical advice, it is to raise awareness of this condition that you need to discuss with your GP. This leaflet has been produced with the help of a grant and support from Thermo Fisher Scientific.

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