



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

Asthma and anaphylaxis

Asthma, food allergy and the high risk of anaphylaxis (severe allergic reaction) frequently occur together and **asthma increases the risk of fatal anaphylaxis.**

It is therefore 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.

You may be unsure if you are having an asthma attack or anaphylaxis, because wheezing, difficulty breathing and a persistent cough can present with anaphylaxis.

If you have sudden 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 two hours after ingestion. Mild to moderate symptoms of allergy may or may not occur before symptoms of anaphylaxis.

If you have asthma, have been prescribed an adrenaline (epinephrine) autoinjector 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.
- 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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