

## Asthma in teenagers

Dealing with asthma can be difficult for anybody, and for teenagers it is often accompanied by embarrassment and confusion. Here are some tips for helping your teenager manage their asthma.



- ▶ Encourage your teenager to educate their family and friends about their asthma, and to tell them how to deal with an emergency.
- ▶ Remind your teenager that having asthma doesn't make them 'different' from everyone else, and encourage them to participate in sport and social events.
- ▶ Teenagers with asthma should avoid smoking and smoky areas.
- ▶ Teenagers should be reminded that dancing is exercise! Remind them to use their reliever medicine before they hit the dance floor, if their doctor recommends it.
- ▶ Encourage your teenager to work with their doctor to formulate a written asthma action plan. This plan will help them to manage their asthma effectively and ensure they are getting the appropriate type and amount of medicine. Emphasise that honesty with their doctor will help their asthma management.
- ▶ Your doctor will probably want to review your teenager's asthma action plan periodically — encourage your teenager to attend for these reviews.
- ▶ Help your teenager find out about famous people who have succeeded despite having asthma; it may give them the confidence boost they need! For example, many elite athletes have asthma, including Jana Rawlinson (nee Pittman) and Matt Shirvington.
- ▶ Include your teenager in discussions about the management and monitoring of their asthma: excluding them may lead to confusion and resentment surrounding their condition.
- ▶ Encourage your teenager to lead an active lifestyle, combined with a healthy and nutritious diet to help control their asthma.
- ▶ Remember that teenagers tend to view constant reminders to take medicines as nagging — try to strike a balance between monitoring your teenager's asthma and encouraging them to look after themselves.
- ▶ Many teenagers rely on reliever inhalers rather than continuing to take preventer medicines. This can be dangerous to their health, so remind them that preventers (if prescribed by their doctor) are important because asthma is an inflammatory disease and preventers help stop inflammation. Talk to your doctor together if you can't resolve the problem.
- ▶ If you are having problems trying to persuade your teenager to take their medicine, encourage them to use their peak flow meter reading as the arbiter of whether they need to adjust their medicine. This way you won't seem like you are being overbearing. Your teenager's asthma action plan should have details of the peak flow reading that your teenager should be aiming for.
- ▶ See if your local community health centre or youth health service runs a support group for young people with asthma — your teenager may benefit from talking to other people with asthma.
- ▶ Encourage your teenager to enjoy life — their asthma can be controlled!

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