



Asthma

Asthma is an illness caused by long-term inflammation of the respiratory airways. In Finland, 5–10 percent of the adult population and 3–6 percent of children are diagnosed with asthma. Most people with asthma are able to live a normal, active life when their condition is treated properly.

Causes of asthma

The risk of getting asthma is increased by, for instance:

- genetics,
- allergies and allergic rhinitis,
- smoking,
- obesity.

Additionally, workplace conditions or substances processed at work, such as allergens, chemicals and dust, may cause asthma or make its symptoms worse.

Asthma symptoms

Most common asthma symptoms include coughing, increased mucus secretion, wheezing and shortness of breath.

Asthma tests

Asthma diagnosis, meaning the examination and confirming of the condition by a doctor, is based on identifying suitable symptoms and assessing other preliminary information, as well as measuring lung function with breathing tests.

The most common breathing tests for asthma include PEF monitoring and spirometry tests. Other common methods are X-rays of the lungs and blood tests that measure the patient's eosinophil count.

Asthma treatment

There are efficient medicines for treating asthma. Asthma symptoms can be alleviated with self-care and a healthy lifestyle.

Asthma is treated with inhaled medication, which is taken with separate dispensers, i.e. inhalers. There is a wide variety of inhalers. The medication can be powdered or spray-like.

In addition to long-term controller medications, asthmatics should also carry a fast-acting reliever to be used when necessary. The relievers provide short-term relief by quickly opening narrowed airways.

Good self-care for asthmatics includes:

- non-smoking: smoking reduces the effect of asthma medication and continuously irritates airways;
- weight management: being overweight reduces the effect of asthma medication and increases the risk of falling ill with other diseases;
- regular exercise: helps maintain lung capacity;
- taking good care of other illnesses: it is particularly important to treat allergies and nasal diseases well.

Flare-up care

Asthma exacerbation, or flare-up, refers to a situation where asthma symptoms become significantly worse during multiple consecutive days. All asthmatics should have written instructions on how to treat a flare-up. Provided by public health care, these instructions should be followed.

See a doctor if the symptoms do not ease off within 1–3 days or your condition becomes worse and breathing becomes more difficult, even when you are taking medication as instructed.

Support and advice for asthma patients

You do not have to be alone with asthma. You can look for information and tips from professionals as well as other asthmatics. At events organised by your local allergy and asthma association, you can get information on asthma and meet other asthma patients.

You can also join a private Facebook group called 'Allergy, asthma & atopic dermatitis peer group in Finland'. In this group, you can exchange thoughts with other asthma patients about your disease and living with it.

Free advisory services provided by Finnish Allergy, Skin and Asthma Federation help you in English if you have questions about living with asthma or the social security of an asthma patient.

Asthma advisory service provided by a health care professional:
allergianeuvoja@allergia.fi

Social security advisory service provided by a social worker: **risto.heikkinen@allergia.fi**