



Talking with your doctor and nurse (asthma)

FACT SHEET prepared by The Asthma Foundation

Good communication with your doctor and nurse is an essential part of your health care, and will help ensure that you are able to manage your asthma as well as possible. Everyone with asthma should have their asthma reviewed by their doctor once a year when they are well. Don't leave it until you are acutely unwell.

Before your appointment:

- ✦ Make a list of questions or issues you want to discuss. Put them in order of importance to you:
 - Include anything you need to update your health professional about — for example, how things are going with your medications, how often you are using your reliever inhalers, any changes in your symptoms, changes in your weight or sleep, any changes in the amount of exercise you can do without getting short of breath or wheezy and whether you are using any complementary or alternative therapies (CAM) such as herbal remedies or homeopathy.
 - If you think you will need longer than a normal visit, make this clear when you make the appointment.
- ✦ Bear in mind that the more specific you can be, the better. For example, it will help if you can say precisely what your symptoms are, when you experience them, and how they affect your daily activities. Keeping a written record such as a peak flow or symptom diary between appointments may help with this.
- ✦ Decide whether you want to take a support person with you, and/or someone to help translate if English is not your first language.

During your appointment:

- ✦ Be honest. It may be tempting to say what you think they want to hear, but it's in your best interests to tell it how it really is. Tell them what medication you are actually taking, and let them know any concerns you may have about side effects.
- ✦ It is very important to let your doctor know if you are taking any complementary and alternative medicines (CAM) and smoking tobacco or other substances.
- ✦ Ask questions if there is anything you don't understand.
- ✦ Get information and any instructions in writing where possible. Your doctor or nurse will either be able to give you some background material to take away, or tell you where you can access it. Information on asthma is also available from your local asthma society, or see the Foundation's website — www.asthmafoundation.org.nz
- ✦ Check whether it might be useful to talk with one of the other members of the health team — there may be an asthma nurse educator, physiotherapist or pharmacist in your area who could give you more detailed information and practical advice.

- ✿ Make sure you know what happens next — for example, when you need to come back for another check-up.

Things you may want to ask about asthma:

- ✿ Do I have the correct diagnosis — should I have a spirometry test to confirm my diagnosis?
- ✿ What is asthma?
- ✿ Who gets it?
- ✿ How might asthma affect me?
- ✿ What things at home or work might make it worse?
- ✿ What is the recommended treatment for asthma, and how does it work?
- ✿ What are my alternatives?
- ✿ Medication:
 - Are there any associated risks or side effects?
 - Is there anything special I should do, or anything I should avoid (e.g. types of food, alcohol, or other medications), while on this treatment?
 - Should I use this inhaler with a spacer device?
 - My asthma is well controlled – can I reduce my medication?
- ✿ Your inhaler technique (how you hold and use the inhaler) should be checked each time you see your doctor or nurse. This will ensure that you're getting the most benefit from the medicine you are taking.
- ✿ How will I know if my asthma gets better or worse?
- ✿ Can I have a written Self Management Plan, so I know what to do if my asthma is getting worse or improving? This plan should be reviewed regularly.
- ✿ Would a peak flow meter or symptom diary help me?
- ✿ What else can I do to make sure I stay as well as possible?
- ✿ *You can ask for a referral to a specialist respiratory physician* if the treatment you and your doctor have agreed on doesn't appear to be working as well as you would both like.

The Asthma Foundation can help you

The Asthma Foundation is New Zealand's not-for-profit sector authority on asthma and other respiratory illnesses. We advocate to government and raise awareness of respiratory illnesses, fund research for better treatments and educate on best practice.

Check out our comprehensive website at www.asthmafoundation.org.nz