

THE MEDICAL CENTRE

ASTHMA NEWSLETTER

Asthma or COPD

Our respiratory clinic deals with two main respiratory conditions that have many things in common: asthma and COPD: Chronic (means long lasting) Obstructive (refers to difficulty breathing out) Pulmonary Disease (means disease affecting the lungs). It used to be called chronic bronchitis and / or emphysema.

We send this newsletter to asthma patients, but some older patients with asthma develop COPD as well, which is preventable, so it's a good idea for all asthmatics to know about it.

As you know, asthmatics find it difficult to breath out – often causing wheeze. Inhaler treatment can completely reverse this, so a well controlled asthmatic should have no symptoms most of the time. However, in patient's who develop COPD, the inability to breath out is not fully reversible, causing shortness of breath to some extent regardless of treatment. Smoking is the major cause, and many patients with asthma who smoke will eventually develop COPD.

So there are two messages in this column:-

1. If you're an older asthmatic and you feel you're always short of breath or have a chronic productive cough despite your inhalers, please come in for review asking specifically about COPD (especially if you have a history of smoking, even if you don't smoke now). We can do some lung function tests in the surgery to see if you have COPD. This is not a pointless exercise since the inhalers that would be best for you are slightly different to those we use in asthma. If you still smoke, stopping smoking is the most important thing, and we can help you with that also if you wish. If you continue smoking you will get worse much quicker.
2. If you're a younger asthmatic please don't start smoking. If you're an asthmatic who smokes please do your future self a big favour and make a determined effort to stop. Being disabled with chronic irreversible shortness of breath is not pleasant, as our existing COPD patients will tell you. If you would like help stopping smoking please let us know.

Annual review reminder

**If you haven't had a routine asthma review in the last 12 months we invite you to come to our Asthma Clinic run by our excellent well trained respiratory nurses.
Phone 01895 442 026**

Peak flow measurement

It's a good idea to have a peak flow meter and to check your measurements occasionally. If the measurement varies a lot it's a sign your asthma is not so well controlled and you might be at risk from an attack. In particular if your early morning readings are consistently lower than your evening readings your asthma may be inadequately controlled. If you don't have a peak flow meter, please ask for one at your next review. If you never get what you should be getting (the nurse will be able to tell you what you should be getting – depends on age, sex and height) we might need to consider whether you have badly controlled asthma, COPD or another respiratory condition.

'Flu jabs'

We will have annual influenza vaccinations ('flu jabs') in the Autumn & Winter in our annual flu clinic.

They are strongly recommended for:-

- Everyone aged over 65,
- Everyone with COPD,
- Everyone who has been in hospital with asthma

They are generally recommended for:-

- anyone who uses an inhaler every day.