

# MYTH'S IN ASTHMA- FACT AND FICTION!

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For more information on asthma please visit  
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Despite new, strong and specific asthma medications, asthma side effects and deaths continue to increase. This could be due in some part to the many myths, rumours and old wives tales that persist about this common condition. In this leaflet NAEP tackles some of those misconceptions and separates the myth from the reality!

Why is asthma still such a problem?  
This could be due to a number of factors namely:

- Under diagnosis and under treatment.
- Poor self management by patients.
- Inadequate knowledge, skills and confidence by patients.
- Myths and Misconceptions about asthma.

Although this leaflet explores the myths of asthma, it does not focus on how you can reduce the risk factors in your life or home. Please refer to the NAEP website for this, and other pamphlets that deal with specific conditions, such as "risk factors for asthma and triggers for asthma attacks", "asthma and pregnancy" and others

## Some common myths

### MYTH

In South Africa it was found that 60% of people interviewed believed that asthma inhalers weaken the heart. People also believe that inhaled medications, such as asthma inhalers are dangerous.

### REALITY

Inhaled medications, including corticosteroids, are the safest and most effective means to treat asthma that currently exists, and none of the medicines harm the heart. However over-use (i.e. taking more than 5x/day) of reliever pumps (See "Asthma medicines and how they work") can cause a fast heart beat and a feeling of shakiness. If you are really needing to use so much reliever medication it means your asthma is NOT under control. This is usually because you are not taking

enough controller medication, so you will need to see your doctor. Your doctor will look at the dose of controller treatment you are taking, how regularly you use it and your technique of using your pumps. If necessary he / she will increase your anti-inflammatory controller medication and write you a personal action plan. (See "Keeping asthma under control")

### MYTH

In a study in South Africa, 70% believed that using asthma medication regularly, would lead to addiction and render the medications ineffective.

### REALITY

Regular controller treatment for prevention of asthma attacks is the best treatment for asthma. Using controller treatment regularly will stop you having any symptoms and allow you to live your life to the fullest, even taking part in sport and all other activities. Using controller treatment regularly will stop you having any symptoms so that you no longer have to rely on reliever pumps. Using controller treatment regularly, and only reducing the dose when your doctor says you are ready, gives you the best chance of out-growing your asthma.

### MYTH

Sixty six percent of South Africans felt that folk remedies were as effective as standard medications in treating asthma. They believe that alternative or traditional medications are equally effective as prescription medications.

### REALITY

Traditional medications have only recently been subject to scientific scrutiny, so the safety and effectiveness of many of these remain unknown. Those that have been tested have not shown benefit. If you believe that a traditional treatment is of benefit to you, consult your doctor to ensure that this is not likely to cause harm, BUT CONTINUE USING your inhalers and other doctor prescribed medication. Alternative or traditional medications should never substitute for the

scientifically-proven medical treatments for asthma and allergies.

### **MYTH**

Asthma can be cured.

### **REALITY**

There is no cure for asthma. However, with the proper diagnosis and treatment, asthmatics can lead normal, active lives with no or few symptoms and little disturbance to quality of life. Treatment however, must be continued as per the doctor's instructions, using controller medication regularly and following a written asthma plan. (See "Keeping asthma under control")

### **MYTH**

If you feel well and have no asthma symptoms, the asthma has gone away and you can stop the asthma medications.

### **REALITY**

Asthma medication should only be stopped on instruction by your doctor. If you feel well and do not have any problems breathing, that is because the asthma medication is working, and your asthma is under control - and this is the reason why you should CONTINUE using your medication as prescribed, not a reason for STOPPING!! However, if your asthma is perfectly controlled for over 3 months (i.e. no asthma symptoms whatsoever) you may discuss decreasing the dose of asthma medications with your doctor.

### **MYTH**

All children out grow asthma once they reach adulthood

### **REALITY**

Some children do out grow their asthma, but this is not true for everyone. If there was only a few wheezing episodes usually at the same time as a respiratory infection, then the child is unlikely to suffer from asthma as an adult. But if the child has full-blown asthma, this is likely to stay into the adult years. Using their controller treatment

as prescribed gives children the best chance of "growing out" of their asthma.

### **MYTH**

Moving to dry climates will cure asthma and allergies (e.g. leaving Durban for Johannesburg).

### **REALITY**

Moving to dry climates may relieve allergies and asthma symptoms for a few months. However, new allergies to local plants in the new area can develop within a short period of time, and symptoms of asthma will return. There is no safe place to move away from allergies and asthma.

### **MYTH**

Smoking does not trigger allergies or asthma.

### **REALITY**

Smoking is a known trigger of allergies and asthma and should not be ignored. Other triggers include pollens, molds, animal dander, dust mites, cockroaches, latex, stinging insects and certain foods. We also know that smoking decreases the effectiveness of asthma therapy. (See "Risk factors for asthma and triggers for asthma attacks").

### **MYTH**

Asthma is a psychological illness.

### **REALITY**

Sometimes certain actions, for example, laughing and crying can start an asthma attack, which has lead to the belief that asthma is an emotional or psychological problem. People who experience an asthma attack whilst laughing, crying or under stress ALREADY have asthma.

### **MYTH**

Some dog breeds, such as Chihuahuas, are less of a problem for people with asthma and allergies because they have less hair.

### **REALITY**

It is the protein found in the pet's saliva, dander and urine that causes allergies in some individuals,

not the pet's hair. Irrespective of dog type, dog dander, saliva and urine will be found in all dogs' living and playing areas. Therefore there are no particular breeds which are better for people with asthma and allergies.

### **MYTH**

People with asthma cannot take part in sports.

### **REALITY**

While exercise can bring on asthma symptoms in people with poorly-controlled asthma, all children (and adults!) need to play and exercise in order to be healthy. There are a number of famous South African sportsmen and women who have asthma, for example Roland Schoeman and Ryk Neethling.

They were encouraged to swim to help their asthma when they were children. People with asthma may need to take their reliever medication before they play, to prevent them developing symptoms when they play or exercise. (See "Sport and asthma")

### **MYTH**

Inhaled steroids stunt children's overall growth.

### **REALITY**

Inhaled steroids do not stunt or affect children's growth, unless used in excessive doses. In fact asthma itself could slow the growth rate of some children!



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