



Asthma & Pregnancy

Advice to keep you healthy during pregnancy and beyond



Be a
Life Saver

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You can now become a member of the Asthma Society of Ireland free of charge! Everyone can become a member for free by signing up at www.asthma.ie. Our members receive lots of benefits such as discounted asthma products, advance notice of our events and our bi-annual magazine Asthma News.



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asthma.ie or call 01 817 8886.

About Us

The Asthma Society of Ireland is the national charity dedicated to empowering the 470,000 people with asthma in Ireland to take control of their asthma.

Asthma cannot be cured but it can be controlled. We are working to reduce the number of deaths and hospital visits caused by asthma and to increase the number of people receiving the right information and support to allow them to control their asthma.

We support people with asthma and their families by providing a wide range of high quality information and education services – all completely free of charge.

We provide a strong, unified voice, and strive to improve the health and quality of life of everyone with asthma in Ireland.

We drive change nationally by raising awareness, supporting innovative research and advocating for universal access to best practice asthma care.

We actively work with health care professionals, industry and government bodies to provide expert information on asthma and allergies and to keep asthma high on the national agenda.



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Introduction

Whether you are planning a pregnancy, are already pregnant or have recently given birth [Asthma and Pregnancy](#) aims to give you all the information you need to keep you and your baby healthy.

Poorly controlled asthma can be bad for your health during pregnancy, and for the health of your baby. The information in this booklet can help you manage your asthma and keep it well controlled. Well controlled asthma reduces the risk of harm to your baby and the risk of complications during delivery. By following our advice throughout your pregnancy, you and your baby can be just as healthy as a mother and child without asthma.

Inside you will find advice on how to manage your asthma while pregnant and information on:

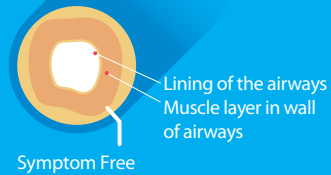
- [Avoiding triggers during pregnancy](#)
- [Taking medication during pregnancy and while breastfeeding](#)
- [What to do if you have an asthma attack during pregnancy or when you are giving birth](#)

About Asthma

What is Asthma?

Asthma is a common chronic disease which inflames the airways. The airways are the small tubes that carry air in and out of the lungs. Asthma causes the airways to become over-sensitive and react to things they wouldn't normally react to, such as colds and flus or dust mites – even family pets, these are called triggers.

When asthma symptoms are triggered the muscles around the wall of the airways tighten, making them narrow. The lining of the airways also swells and sticky mucus is produced, clogging up the already narrowed airways. With the airways narrow and clogged with mucus, it becomes difficult to breathe.



What are the Symptoms of Asthma?

The symptoms of asthma are one or any combination of:

- Shortness of breath
- Regular wheezing
- Chest tightness
- Coughing

What Causes Asthma?

The exact causes of asthma are still unknown. Asthma usually starts in early childhood, but sometimes it develops at later stages in life. Asthma can run in families and children are more likely to have asthma if they have a parent or parents with asthma. Asthma is linked to other allergic diseases and people with asthma often suffer from conditions such as eczema and hay fever.

For more information on asthma triggers, symptoms, medication and management visit www.asthma.ie

Asthma in Ireland



Ireland has the **fourth highest** rate of asthma in the world

Asthma is the most common chronic disease in Ireland

More than 470,000 people have asthma in Ireland



Around 1 in every 10 pregnant women has asthma



Asthma cannot be cured but can be controlled



Asthma can be fatal if not treated correctly



60% of asthma is uncontrolled

Acknowledgements: We would like to thank Dr Des Murphy of the Asthma Society of Ireland Medical Advisory Group and Dr Annemarie McLaughlin of St James' Hospital, Dublin for their guidance in producing this booklet.

Managing Your Asthma During Pregnancy & Beyond

Pregnancy affects asthma in different ways for different people. For some women their asthma symptoms remain the same, some find they worsen, whilst others find their symptoms actually improve. During pregnancy your health is more important than ever. With so much to think about it can be easy to forget about managing your asthma, but it is important to remember that asthma is bad for your health and can harm your baby so good asthma management is essential.



Asthma Adviceline:
1850 44 54 64
Mon - Fri: 10am ~ 1pm



Keeping your asthma controlled is good for your baby's health

Becoming Pregnant

Good asthma control before you're pregnant means you are more likely to have good control while pregnant, so if you are planning a pregnancy it is important to get your asthma under control. If you are planning a pregnancy or have just found out you are pregnant there are a few things you should do:

- Keep taking your asthma medication as normal unless instructed to do otherwise by your doctor.
- Don't smoke and avoid second hand smoke.
- Have your asthma reviewed by your GP. Your practice nurse and pharmacist can also give you useful information about keeping your asthma under control.
- Develop an asthma management plan or update your existing plan with your doctor, asthma nurse or other healthcare professionals.
- Ask your doctor if you need to take iron supplements.
- Make sure your obstetric team knows that you have asthma and about any medication you are taking.
- Bring all your asthma medication to your first obstetrics appointment.
- Get the flu vaccination.

Asthma During Pregnancy

Good asthma control during pregnancy is very important. The key to controlling your asthma while pregnant is a combination of:

- Avoiding asthma triggers
- Monitoring your peak flow
- Having your medication tailored by your doctor
- Working with your doctor, nurse or pharmacists to make sure you know about your medication, symptoms, inhaler technique and triggers, as well as how to recognise the signs that your asthma is getting worse
- Good communication between your obstetric and respiratory teams

Throughout your pregnancy there are a number of things that might affect your asthma. Below is a list of things you should be mindful of, but if you have any additional concerns you should contact your healthcare professional or call the Asthma Adviceline on 1850 44 54 64.

Smoking

If you are planning a pregnancy or discover that you are pregnant you should stop smoking immediately and avoid passive smoke. Smoking is harmful for both you and your baby. Smoking during pregnancy increases the risk that your baby will have breathing problems or asthma. Smoking also increases your risk of miscarriage and premature labour

Advice and support on stopping smoking is available from the Asthma Adviceline on 1850 44 54 64 or the National Smoking Quitline on 1850 201 203.



Smoking worsens asthma control. Don't smoke and avoid second-hand smoke

Acid Reflux

Acid reflux is common during pregnancy and may change your asthma symptoms or make them worse. Heartburn is a common symptom and a sign you might have acid reflux. Your doctor or midwife will be able to diagnose acid reflux and might suggest some medication to ease symptoms, such as antacids. You should not take antacids or any other over the counter medication before checking with a healthcare professional first. If you are taking iron supplements, you should avoid taking them at the same time as an antacid.

There are also some simple steps you can take to limit the risk of acid reflux:

- Eat smaller meals
- Use extra pillows when lying down
- Avoid eating late at night
- Avoid lying down after eating



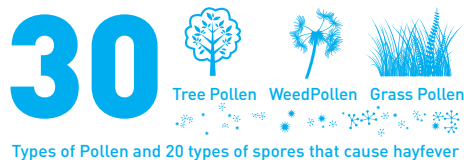
Acid reflux is common during pregnancy. Eat small portions frequently to avoid reflux

Asthma During Pregnancy

Sinusitis, Allergies and Hay fever

Many women suffer from allergic rhinitis, more commonly known as hay fever or sinusitis during pregnancy. The symptoms of allergic rhinitis and sinusitis often overlap.

Allergic rhinitis is usually caused by coming into contact with things such as dust mites, pollen or animal hair. During pregnancy it can also be caused by hormonal changes in the first trimester. Symptoms include sneezing; a blocked or runny nose; an itchy nose, mouth or inner ear and headaches. Some treatments for allergic rhinitis or hay fever should not be taken during pregnancy. **For more information go to page 20** or download a copy of our Asthma and Allergic Rhinitis booklet for free from www.asthma.ie.



Sinusitis is an inflammation of the lining of the air cavities inside the nose and can also be caused by allergies. Symptoms of sinusitis include headache, facial tenderness, pressure or pain in the sinuses, nasal stuffiness, a sore throat or cough. Often sinusitis goes away of its own accord; however there are some simple steps you can take to ease symptoms:

- Drink plenty of fluids
- Use a saline nasal rinse
- Breathe in steam
- Use extra pillows at night
- Avoid things that might irritate your sinuses such as perfumes or smoke.

Often sinusitis goes away of its own accord; however sometimes treatment such as antibiotics, decongestants or steroid nasal sprays may be required.

If you suffer from allergic rhinitis or sinusitis consult with your doctor before taking any medication and let your pharmacist know that you are pregnant.

Stress

Feeling calm and relaxed and avoiding stress is important during pregnancy. There are many ways to relax and de-stress during pregnancy. Yoga and meditation are popular, with lots of tailor made classes for pregnant women on offer. Before starting a yoga class make sure your teacher is qualified and that they know you are pregnant and have asthma. If you are worried about managing stress during your pregnancy speak to your doctor, midwife or nurse for advice.

Stress can trigger your asthma. Speak to your health care professional if you are feeling overly stressed or anxious.

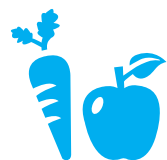
Diet

If you have asthma, it's important to have a healthy diet with a variety of nutritious food-the same is true if you are pregnant. Poor diets, consisting of high amounts of processed food, vegetable oils and salt are not good for your asthma and also increase the risk of your child developing asthma.

You should eat at least five portions of fresh fruit and vegetables every day, fish (including oily fish) at least twice a week, and pulses, like beans and lentils, on a regular basis. To make sure your diet is healthy, use the food pyramid as a guide to the types and portions of food you should eat.

Your diet should include lots of food from the bottom of the pyramid, such as cereals, breads, fruit and vegetables and less from the middle, such as dairy, meat and fish. Foods from the top of the pyramid, such as sweets and cakes, should not be eaten every day.

An allergy to peanuts may develop in the womb. If you or anyone in your family has asthma, hay fever or eczema, you should avoid eating peanuts during pregnancy or while breastfeeding.



A diet full of fresh fruit, vegetables, fish, beans and lentils is good for your asthma and good for your baby!



Asthma During Labour

Asthma attacks during labour are rare as your body produces extra hormones that help prevent an attack. If you have asthma symptoms during labour you can use your usual inhalers — make sure you bring all your asthma medication to the hospital with you. All forms of pain relief used in labour are safe for women with asthma to use, including epidural analgesia and Entonox. Constructing a birth plan with your doctor, midwife or nurse is a good idea and will help ease any concerns you might have.

Breastfeeding

Women with asthma are encouraged to breastfeed as there are lots of health benefits for both mother and baby. If possible you should breastfeed exclusively for the first six months, before introducing solid food or formula. Breast milk lowers your baby's risk of wheezing and chest infections, as well as the risk of developing intestinal illnesses and gastric infections. Studies suggest that breastfeeding reduces the risk of babies developing asthma, especially if there is history of asthma in the family.

It is safe to breastfeed while taking asthma medication and asthma medication does not affect your ability to produce milk. Medication in steroid tablets can sometimes appear in breast milk but the amount is microscopic and won't affect your baby. If you have concerns you should speak to your doctor, midwife or nurse.

If you choose not to breastfeed or it isn't possible, you should speak to your doctor, midwife or nurse about the best formula to use. Certain types of formula, such as hydrolysed milk formula, are less likely to produce an allergic reaction than others.



Breast feeding reduces the risk of your baby developing asthma

Medication



Asthma medication is safe to take while you are pregnant or breast feeding. Treating your asthma when you are pregnant is very similar to treating it when you are not. Sometimes women stop taking their asthma medication while pregnant because they are worried about the affect on their baby. This results in worsening symptoms and can be harmful to both mother and baby. Taking your asthma medication and having good asthma control is far safer, for you and your baby, than the very slight possibility of side effects. If you are taking your asthma medication as prescribed but your symptoms are getting worse, keep taking your medication and contact your doctor who may change your medication or dosage.

There are a variety of different treatments and medications for asthma. Some help to control your symptoms and stop them happening, others work to relieve your symptoms when they do happen.

Relievers

When you breathe in reliever medication it relaxes the muscles around the airways, allowing them to widen and making it easier for you to breathe. Relievers work quickly to reduce your symptoms. You should use your reliever inhaler whenever you get asthma symptoms or if you are having an asthma attack. Everyone with asthma should have a reliever inhaler and you should always carry your reliever inhaler with you.

Controllers

The key to controlling your asthma is to use your controller inhaler every day, even when you are well. Controller medication contains a steroid called corticosteroids. It does not relieve your symptoms immediately, but builds up over a period of time to reduce swelling in the airways and stop your symptoms developing.

For more information on asthma medication see www.asthma.ie

Other Treatments

Combination inhalers give you a dose of reliever medication and a dose of controller medication at the same time.

Leukotriene Receptor Antagonists or LTRAs help control your asthma by stopping the natural chemicals in your airways that can cause them to narrow and become inflamed. They are usually given as a tablet. LTRAs are not usually prescribed during pregnancy but if you are already using them and they are working well your doctor may advise you to keep taking them.

Theophylline Tablets may be given to widen your airways and reduce inflammation. They are safe to take during pregnancy but may cause nausea and are best taken with food.

Controller or Steroid Tablets are safe to take during pregnancy. They contain larger amounts of medication than a controller inhaler and may be prescribed for a short time if your asthma gets worse. They work to reduce the inflammation in your airways.

The Flu Vaccine is safe during pregnancy. Anyone who is pregnant or has asthma should get the flu vaccine.

Medication You Should Avoid

It is important to consult your doctor before taking any medication, especially during the first and second trimester. Some medication used for asthma and allergies should be avoided during pregnancy:

Antihistamines are used to treat hay fever and allergic reactions. They should only be used by pregnant women under a doctor's supervision.

Decongestants are used to relieve a blocked nose. They are not safe to use if you are pregnant.

Antacids to treat heartburn that contain bicarbonate or magnesium should not be taken on a regular basis.

Immunotherapy is used to improve allergy or asthma symptoms. If you are already undergoing immunotherapy you can continue, but you should not start immunotherapy during pregnancy.

Signs Your Asthma is Getting Worse

If your asthma is getting worse it usually happens gradually over a few days and rarely comes out of the blue. To make sure you act fast and don't let your symptoms deteriorate keep an eye out for the following signs that your asthma is getting worse:

- An increase in the frequency or severity of your symptoms (cough, breathlessness, wheeze or chest tightness)
- Needing more reliever inhaler than usual
- Waking at night because of your symptoms
- Not able to be as active as usual
- A drop in your peak flow reading
- Unable to walk as far or quickly as usual or becoming short of breath when you do.

If you notice any of these signs that your asthma is getting worse don't ignore them- get medical advice!



Always carry your blue reliever inhaler with you

What to do in an Asthma Attack

Asthma attacks are frightening and can be dangerous for both you and your baby. Asthma attacks can happen when symptoms get worse over a number of days or hours, so it is important not to ignore your symptoms when they start. However, asthma attacks can also happen suddenly, even when you are taking your asthma treatment and avoiding your triggers.

It is important to know the signs of an asthma attack and what to do if you have one. You should develop a written asthma management plan with your doctor or nurse. Your asthma management plan will have all the information you need to keep your asthma controlled and will help you recognise when your asthma is getting worse so you can prevent an asthma attack. Go to www.asthma.ie for a free asthma management plan that you can fill in with your doctor or nurse.

How do I Know if I am having an Asthma Attack?

Below are the signs of an asthma attack. If you are having an asthma attack you will have one or a combination of any of the symptoms below:

- Cough
- Wheeze
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness
- Too breathless to finish a sentence
- Too breathless to walk, sleep or eat
- Lips turning blue.



Make sure your Asthma Management Plan is up to date and carry your asthma attack card with you

If you are having an asthma attack immediately follow the 5 step Rule

1

Take two puffs of reliever inhaler (usually blue), one puff at a time

2

Sit up and stay calm

3

Take slow steady breaths

4

If there is no improvement, take one puff of reliever inhaler every minute:

- Adults and children over six years can take up to ten puffs in ten minutes
- Children under six years can take up to six puffs in ten minutes




5

Call 999 or 112 if symptoms do not improve after ten minutes or you are worried.

Repeat Step 4 if an ambulance does not arrive within ten minutes.





Remember, if you are having an asthma attack:

- Extra puffs of reliever are safe
- You should use a spacer if possible
- Don't lie down or let anyone put their arm around you.



Yes, I wish to give the Asthma Society a regular gift:



€5 ■

A month could help us save lives by providing vital information services to children and adults across Ireland.

€10 ■

A month could help us extend the opening hours of our Asthma Adviceline (10am to 1pm), ensuring our specialist asthma nurses are available to take potentially life saving calls.

€21 ■

A month could help us send our Mobile Clinics nationwide to help the 60% of people with asthma that do not have control over the condition, improving their control and quality of life.

Preferred amount ■

If you donate €250 or more in one year we can claim tax back at no expense to you.

I (print name) _____

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By signing this mandate form, you authorise (A) The Asthma Society of Ireland to send instructions to your bank to debit your account and (B) your bank to debit your account in accordance with the instructions from the Asthma Society of Ireland. As part of your rights, you are entitled to a refund from your bank under the terms and conditions of your agreement with your bank. A refund must be claimed within 8 weeks starting from the date on which your account was debited. Your rights are explained in a statement that you can obtain from your bank.

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Date

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Creditor Address: 42-43 Amiens Street, Dublin 1, Ireland

Unique Mandate Reference _____

(For Office Use Only)

Please return this form to The Asthma Society of Ireland, 4th Floor, 42 – 43 Amiens Street, Dublin 1

Donate today by calling us on 01 817 8886 or donate securely online at www.asthma.ie

Yes, I want to support the Asthma Society with a one off gift:

€40 ■

Could help us save lives by providing vital information services to children and adults across Ireland.

€60 ■

Could help us extend the opening hours of our Asthma Adviceline (10am to 1pm), ensuring our specialist asthma nurses are available to take potentially life saving calls.

€100 ■

Could help us send our Mobile Clinics nationwide to help the 60% of people with asthma that do not have control over the condition, improving their control and quality of life.

Preferred amount ■

If you donate €250 or more in one year we can claim tax back at no expense to you.

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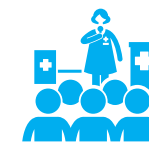
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Donate today by calling us on 01 817 8886 or donate securely online at www.asthma.ie

Further Information



Would you Like More Information?

If you would like further information on asthma or allergies please contact us. You can speak to one of our Asthma Specialist Nurses and get one on one advice on your asthma. We also have a range of information available on www.asthma.ie, in our publications and in tools designed to help you take control of your asthma.

The Asthma Adviceline

If you would like further information or you have questions that weren't answered by this booklet please call our **Asthma Adviceline on 1850 44 54 64** between 10am and 1pm every Monday-Friday or email nurse@asthma.ie. A specialist nurse will be on hand to answer your query and give you personalised advice on how to manage your condition.

Asthma Clinics

Our Asthma Clinics are held throughout the country and are free for everyone to attend. We visit schools, pharmacies and communities all over Ireland. For more information on our clinics or to book a clinic in your area visit www.asthma.ie

Asthma Publications

We have a range of publications dealing with topics such as childhood asthma, asthma management, asthma and exercise, allergies, asthma in schools, and many more. If you would like to order a free Asthma Management Plan or any of our publications log on to www.asthma.ie or call **01 817 8886**.

Let us know what you think!

We would love your feedback on this booklet. You can send your feedback, comments or suggestions to communications@asthma.ie or call us on **01 817 8886**.



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Email: office@asthma.ie



Fighting asthma with every breath.



Disclaimer

The information contained in this publication is based on current medical knowledge, in accordance with international best practice guidelines, at the time of publication. The information is intended for use as a general guide and does not replace individual consultation by a health care professional on a case-by-case basis.

The Asthma Society of Ireland is not responsible for any injury, loss, damage or expense incurred by any individual or organisation resulting, either directly or indirectly, from any information contained in this publication.