



## Adolescents and Asthma

Youth, young people, teenagers and adolescents are all labels, which are given to 12-20 year olds.

Adolescence is a distinctive part of life, and is distinguishable from other times in life's cycle. To ensure effective asthma management in teenagers, it is important to understand their behaviour.

Adolescence is a time of physical, emotional and personal growth. The process itself is about a child moving to adulthood, about becoming an independent individual, who can also fit into society. Adolescents learn to make their own decisions, and how to balance the risk and benefits of behaviour. In addition, physical body changes and sexuality issues are part of this development phase. Often, there are also school pressures and parental expectations to live with.

Adults often associate teenagers with selfish and erratic behaviour. However, when we look at this positively, it could be the adolescent is gaining control of their own life and trying new experiences. We all want children to grow into adults who can make informed choices and ultimately take full responsibility for themselves. For an adolescent with asthma it is one more thing to juggle. Eventually however, children grow to be responsible adults who learn to balance life.

### Ten points to Good Asthma Management:

1. Encourage the adolescent and doctor to have medical consultations alone. The parent/carer could become involved at the end of the consultation time to hear the outcomes. This approach acknowledges respect for the adolescent as an individual.
2. Encourage the adolescent to adopt an asthma management regime that is realistic and achievable. Remember however, asthma management may not be perceived as important by some adolescents. Tolerance and compromise may avoid total rejection by the adolescent.
3. Peak flow monitoring is an ideal way for an adolescent to monitor and manage their asthma.
4. A written asthma management plan developed between the adolescent and doctor allows the adolescent to assume control of their asthma by taking on responsibility and making some choices for themselves. Be open to other options suggested by the adolescent.
5. If adolescents can see that some personal benefit will reward from their actions, they are more likely to carry them out. "If your asthma is under control, you'll feel and look better" are positive messages for the adolescent. Image can be extremely important to the adolescent, thus having control over their appearance can influence their self-esteem and individuality.
6. Common adolescent behaviours regarding asthma include a tendency to ignore persistent symptoms, restricting activities rather than use their inhalers in the presence of their peers, overuse of their inhalers without addressing underlying problems of poor asthma control and denial of poor health from asthma.
7. Information that explains but avoids dictating is often received more readily by the adolescent.
8. Acknowledging effort with praise and encouragement, rather than just emphasising lapses and past mistakes, will avoid defensive attitudes. Avoid confrontations and ultimatums.
9. Take time to listen to the adolescent as this allows them a sense of control.
10. Maintain a sense of humour!

Adolescence is a period of life when independence and individuality are achieved. For adolescents with asthma, achieving control of their asthma management is challenging. Supporting the adolescent during this period can result in positive results for all concerned.

For more information contact The Asthma Foundation of Queensland on 1800 645 130.

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