

HEALTH REPORT

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POLL SHOWS IT'S TIME TO GET SERIOUS ABOUT ASTHMA

Startling new research published in the latest issue of the Pfizer Australia Health Report, reveals that an alarming amount of people with asthma are placing themselves in danger. This is despite the fact that asthma is widely understood to be a serious medical condition.

The survey reveals that over half of Australians with asthma have exercised less often than monthly or not at all in the last six months. Additionally, 15 percent of Australians with asthma smoke cigarettes.

According to the Asthma Foundations of Australia, not addressing the condition appropriately will exacerbate the severity of asthma symptoms.

Another key finding of the research is that one in four people with asthma have not discussed their condition with a GP in the last 12 months.

The Asthma Foundations of Australia recommends people with asthma should visit their doctor regularly, stay active and healthy, and avoid triggers such as cigarette smoke to best manage their condition.

"We advise people with asthma to visit their doctor once every six months to review their asthma management, which includes having a written asthma action plan," said Mr Peter Adamson, President of the Asthma Foundations of Australia.

"Although there is no cure for asthma, illness and death associated with asthma can be reduced with proper diagnosis, medical management and education. Being active is also crucial to controlling asthma and part of good asthma management.

"Most people with asthma can lead a normal life and participate competitively in sport. You'd be surprised how many world-class athletes have asthma," said Mr Adamson.

Tobacco smoking is the largest preventable cause of illness and death in Australia, and is known to increase the risk of lung cancer, cardiovascular disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and several other conditions.

"Tobacco smoke can trigger or worsen asthma by damaging the little hair-like structures which move dust, pollens and other irritants from the lungs. This means that the normal cleaning action of the lungs is damaged which can lead to chest infections and in turn bring on or worsen asthma," said Mr Adamson.

The survey also found that asthma is debilitating for a large number of Australians, and not just physically. Research conducted last year by Adelaide's Queen Elizabeth Hospital revealed a significant link between asthma and depression.

The new Pfizer Australia research confirms that the condition affects the emotional wellbeing of one in five people with asthma.

"People with asthma often experience psychological distress and decreased feelings of control. In fact, those with severe asthma have twice the rate of depression as the general community," said Mr Adamson.

Another finding from the survey is that asthma prevents one in four people from participating in activities, such as sport and housework.

"Asthma symptoms during or after activity may be a sign of poorly controlled asthma or Exercise-Induced Asthma. However, people with asthma cope better and have fewer attacks if they are active.

"This research tells us that we still have a job to do to ensure that people are well-educated on their asthma medication and management," he said.

The majority of Australians with asthma (80 percent) could not identify the difference between preventer and reliever medications, while one in four of those surveyed do not know what triggers their asthma.

Over a quarter of Australians surveyed mistakenly believe that dairy products and exercise trigger symptoms in all people with asthma.

"Most people with asthma can enjoy the benefits of dairy foods and exercise without experiencing any problems. However, each person may have different triggers, so it's important to seek medical help if your symptoms are exacerbated by certain triggers," said Mr Adamson. "Asthma cannot be cured, but it can be controlled to enable you to carry out your daily activities symptom free."

Key tips for controlling asthma from the Asthma Foundations of Australia are:

1. Taking asthma medications as directed
2. Monitoring asthma
3. Staying active and healthy
4. Avoiding triggers whenever possible
5. Having a written asthma action plan
6. Visiting the doctor regularly to review your asthma management

World Asthma Day 2005 is being held on Tuesday 3 May. This year's theme of 'Unmet Needs of Asthma' has been chosen to call the attention of doctors and patients alike to the need for better asthma treatment and control.

To assist with educating the public about asthma, the Asthma Foundations of Australia has collaborated with Pfizer Australia to produce this month's edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report. Filled with useful information, free copies can be requested by phoning **1800 675 229** or by visiting www.healthreport.com.au where people can also sign-up for email alerts of future editions.

The findings on Australian perceptions of asthma are based on responses from 1249 Australians aged 18 years and over. The research was conducted in December 2004 by independent consultants Stollznow Research.

People can contact the Asthma Foundation in their state for advice by phoning 1800 645 130.

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NB: INTERVIEWS WITH LOCAL SPOKESPEOPLE ARE ALSO AVAILABLE IN EACH STATE/TERRITORY.

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