

This series on Asthma Topics for Consumers comprises eight separate titles:

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- 4 Asthma and Air Pollution
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- 8 Asthma and Wheezing in the First Years of Life

To access these documents log on to:
www.NationalAsthma.org.au or contact
 your local Asthma Foundation on **1800 645 130**.

Further information

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist or contact your local Asthma Foundation on **1800 645 130**.

Asthma Foundations of Australia

www.asthmaaustralia.org.au

National Asthma Council www.NationalAsthma.org.au

Asthma www.health.gov.au/pq/asthma

HealthInsite www.healthinsite.gov.au

Australasian Society for Clinical Immunology and Allergy www.allergy.org.au

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Disclaimer

Information in this brochure is not intended to replace professional medical advice. Any questions regarding a medical diagnosis or treatment should be directed to a medical practitioner.

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Asthma and Pain Relievers

Taking pain relievers safely



Asthma affects over two million Australians: one in four children, one in seven teenagers and one in ten adults.

Up to 20% of people with asthma may have an asthma attack after taking aspirin or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), used to treat pain, muscle and joint inflammation, colds or flu. This is known as *aspirin-induced asthma*. The attack may be preceded by a runny nose or hay fever-like symptoms, sneezing and flushing of the face. The attack can be very severe and life threatening

What pain relievers may affect my asthma?

Aspirin and NSAIDs are safe for the majority of people with asthma. However, if you have aspirin-induced asthma, you must avoid aspirin and NSAIDs.

Some people require low-dose aspirin for heart conditions or NSAIDs for the treatment of arthritis. If you have aspirin-induced asthma, desensitisation to aspirin is possible.

This must only be done under the supervision of a specialist with experience of the procedure.

If you are unsure if a particular medicine might trigger your asthma, ask your GP or pharmacist before you take it.



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What pain relievers are safe for me to take?

Medicines containing paracetamol and ibuprofen (an NSAID) are generally safe for people with asthma, including children. However, if you have aspirin-induced asthma, you must consult your doctor about pain relief.

The newer prescription NSAIDs such as *Celebrex* and *Vioxx* appear less likely to cause problems in people with aspirin-induced asthma. Always check with your doctor before using these medicines.

Non-prescription pain relievers and asthma

There are a number of pain relievers, such as aspirin and some NSAIDs, which you can buy from your local pharmacy or supermarket without a prescription. Some of these products can also be used for the treatment of colds and flu. Always ask your doctor and pharmacist and check the ingredients to determine whether these products are likely to trigger your asthma.



Table 1 Some over-the-counter pain relievers containing aspirin or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicine

Oral products	Some brand names*
Aspirin	Alka-Seltzer, Aspirin, AsproClear, Aspro, Bayer aspirin, Bex powders, Disprin, Ecotrin, Sprein, Solprin, Vincent's Powders
Low dose aspirin	Astrix, Cardiprin, Cartia, DBL Aspirin
Diclofenac 25mg	Voltaren Rapid 25
Flurbiprofen 8.75mg	Streptfen
Ibuprofen 200mg	Advil (formerly known as ACT-3), Actiprofen, Nurofen, Nurofen for children, Nurofen Meltlets, Tri-Profen
Ketoprofen 25mg	Orudis
Mefenamic acid	Ponstan
Naproxen sodium 220, 275mg	Anaprox, Aleve, Naprogesic, Nurolasts
Aspirin/codeine combinations	Aspalgin, Codapane, Codiphen, Codis, Disprin Forte, Veganin
Aspirin/dihydrocodeine	Codox
Ibuprofen combination products	Dimetapp Headcold and Flu tablets, Nurofen plus, Nurofen Cold and Flu

* There are many other brands available including those sold by pharmacy groups as home brands.

Be aware!

- Some topical products (e.g. creams or gels you apply to your skin or gums) are NSAIDs or contain salicylates. Salicylates are related to aspirin, and may have similar effects.

The table below lists some topical products that people with asthma should be aware of.

Table 2 Some over-the-counter topical products containing aspirin or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medicine

Topical products	Brand names
Diclofenac	Dencorub Anti-inflammatory Gel, Hexal Diclac Anti-inflammatory Gel, Voltaren Emulgel
Ketoprofen	Orudis Gel
Ibuprofen	Nurofen Gel
Methylsalicylate rubs	Dencorub, Methyl salicylate liniment/ointment
Piroxicam	Feldene Gel

- Some herbal products (such as feverfew or willow bark extracts) also contain salicylates, so always check the label first. Whenever consulting anyone about herbal products, make sure you tell them you have asthma. If you are unsure if a product contains salicylates, try to find an alternative, or consult your doctor or pharmacist before taking the product.
- Some teething or dental gels contain salicylates, e.g. *Bonjela*, *Herron Baby Teething Gel*, *Ora-Sed Jel*, *Seda-gel* and *SM33*. These products should be used with caution by people who react to aspirin.

Remember

Always read the product information leaflet and any warning labels on products. This includes medicines from the pharmacy, supermarket, health food shops and other sources.

If you are unsure about a pain reliever and whether it may affect your asthma, always talk to your doctor or pharmacist before taking the medicine.

Make sure you have a current Asthma Action Plan – if you don't talk, to your doctor.

What should I do if I have an asthma attack triggered by aspirin?

Check your written Asthma Action Plan or follow the 4 Step Asthma First Aid Plan.

4 Step Asthma First Aid Plan

Step 1 Sit upright.

Step 2 Without delay shake a blue/grey reliever puffer and take 4 separate puffs of reliever medication.

The medication is best taken one puff at a time via a spacer device (just use the puffer on its own if you don't have a spacer). Take 4 breaths from the spacer after each puff of medication.

Step 3 Wait 4 minutes.

Step 4 If there is little or no improvement, repeat Steps 2 and 3. If there is still little or no improvement or you feel concerned at any time, call an ambulance immediately. Dial 000.

Continuously repeat Steps 2 and 3 while waiting for the ambulance.

Children: 4 puffs each time is a safe dose.

Adults: up to 6-8 puffs every 5 minutes may be given for a severe attack while waiting for the ambulance.

