

# Asthma

## Information Pack



### Definition of a Disability

The Equality Act (2010) replaced the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) in providing protection and legal rights for disabled people. It uses the following definition of disability:

*“The Act defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term (i.e. has lasted or is likely to last for at least twelve months) adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”*

More information on the Act can be found at

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/RightsAndObligations/DisabilityRights/DG\\_4001068](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/RightsAndObligations/DisabilityRights/DG_4001068)

### Asthma as a Disability

Asthma affects the small airways (bronchioles) that carry air in and out of the lungs. If you have asthma your airways can become inflamed, swollen and contract down with excess mucus production. About 3.4 million people in the UK have asthma, including 1.4 million whose quality of life is significantly affected (Statistics from the National Asthma Campaign, National Asthma Audit, London 1999/2000).

### What are the symptoms?

- coughing
- wheezing
- shortness of breath
- a tight feeling in the chest.

### What are the causes?

Asthma often runs in families and is more likely if parents and siblings have asthma or other allergies. Children are more likely to develop asthma if their mother smoked during pregnancy or while breastfeeding. Some of the most common predisposing factors for asthma are allergies to house dust mites, mould spores, pollen and pets, and sometimes food allergies. Most people find that there are several things that can trigger their asthma.

**Asthma triggers include:**

- viral infections such as colds and flu
- cigarette smoking in the home
- certain forms of exercise such as running
- exposure to cold dry air
- laughing and other emotions
- medication containing aspirin
- drinks containing sulphur dioxide.

**Diagnosis**

There is no single test for asthma; the diagnosis must always be based on examination and treatment of the person affected. For more information you should contact your GP. Diminished airflow can be measured using a peak expiratory flow meter. This is a simple device into which you blow as hard as possible after taking a deep breath. The meter produces a figure that provides warning of inadequate airflow and of the risk of dangerous deterioration. It also shows the potential for response to treatment.

Asthma is diagnosed if random checks with the peak expiratory flow meter show reduced flow, but then demonstrate that flow improves by greater than 20 per cent after a trial of specific asthma treatment. The diagnosis is also made if peak expiratory flow readings are normal but vary by more than 20 per cent when measured daily after exercise.

In people who can't use a peak expiratory flow meter, the diagnosis of asthma may be made if their symptoms disappear after specific asthma treatment. In children the diagnosis must often be based entirely on symptoms, which may be very variable. There may, however, be a family history of asthma, hay fever or Eczema (atopy).

**Possible Arrangements**

If you have a medical condition such as asthma you may not consider yourself to be disabled, but you may need support or special arrangements in higher education:

- Arrangements for work if fatigue, stress or the effects of medication are an issue
- Suitable accommodation
- Planning to avoid problematic environments
- Medical support and emergency arrangements
- A room to rest in
- Ongoing contact with your college / the University if you have a hidden and / or fluctuating condition
- Flexibility in study arrangements
- Non-medical helper paid for by DSA.

### **Requesting special examination arrangements**

Information about applying for special exam arrangements can be found at: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/exams/>

Requests for examination concessions must be applied for via the college office.

### **Financial Assistance**

Information about applying for **funding** can be found at: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/funding/>

### **Contacts:**

#### **Oxford University Student Union (OUSU)**

Thomas Hull House, New Inn Hall Street, Oxford, OX1 2HU.

Vice-President – Welfare:

Tel: 01864 (2) 88461. Email: [welfare@ousu.org](mailto:welfare@ousu.org)

Web: [www.ousu.org/welfare](http://www.ousu.org/welfare)

OUSU has an active Disabilities Action Group, which works to raise awareness of disability issues in the University.

#### **British Allergy Foundation**

Helpline: 01322 619898 (9am – 5pm, Monday – Friday).

Web: [www.allergyfoundation.com](http://www.allergyfoundation.com)

#### **British Lung Foundation**

Helpline: 08458 505020. Web: [www.lunguk.org](http://www.lunguk.org)

**Asthma UK**

Tel: 020 7786 4900. Helpline: 0800 121 6255 (9am – 5pm, Monday – Friday).

Web: [www.asthma.org.uk](http://www.asthma.org.uk)

**BBC Health's Allergy Guide**

Web: [www.bbc.co.uk/health/asthma/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/asthma/)

**Disability Advisory Service**

E-mail: [disabililty@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:disabililty@admin.ox.ac.uk)

Website: [www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das](http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das)

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