

# Asthma by John Russell

Does your chest regularly feel tight? Do you find it difficult to breathe after light exercise? Do you sometimes make a wheezing sound when you breathe? If so, you might be asthmatic. If you have breathing problems please consult a doctor, but even if you do have asthma – don't worry, you are not alone.

## What is asthma?

Asthma is a condition that affects hundreds of millions of people worldwide and more than five million people in the UK are asthmatic, about one in 13 people. It is a lung disease that affects your airways – the tubes that carry air to and from your lungs. It causes the muscles in these tubes to contract, the tubes themselves to swell and sticky mucus to be produced. All of these factors can make it very difficult for a sufferer to breathe properly.

Shortness of breath, especially after exercise, coughing, or difficulty breathing while sleeping, are all common symptoms. These can be described as mild asthma attacks; however, they can usually be controlled by medication. A severe asthma attack, on the other hand, where a sufferer finds it very difficult to breathe, may require hospital treatment. How badly you are affected by these symptoms depends on what type of asthma you have – from mild to chronic – and how well you are able to control the disorder.

## What causes it?

Asthma is not contagious, although it's still not known precisely what causes it. People can be born with it or develop it in childhood, or at any age. If you have asthma, it's likely that someone else in your family had it, as the illness is known to run in families. There is also some evidence that environmental factors, such as diet, housing conditions or smoking during pregnancy, can cause asthma.

Having the condition doesn't necessarily mean you will suffer badly from the symptoms. Mild or moderate asthma can be easily controlled through medication or lifestyle changes. Additionally, all attacks need a trigger, and if these triggers can be identified and avoided, the likelihood of an attack decreases. Triggers can include: pollution, smoking, dust, animal hair, stress, pollen, exercise, and cold air. These triggers are personal to each individual sufferer, so if you have asthma, make sure you know what is causing your attacks; you can then better avoid these triggers.

## History

Asthma is not a recent condition, in fact there is written evidence of the condition from ancient Egyptian times. The word asthma itself was first coined by the physician Hippocrates over 3,000 years ago, and was the Greek for 'difficult breathing'. Over the years, people have tried many remedies both physical and mental, to combat the illness.

To alleviate the symptoms, people changed their diet, avoided polluted towns, or took herbal/folk cures such as tobacco smoke,

owl's blood, chicken soup, tar fumes, or acupuncture. Blood letting and opium were also popular treatments. Prayer and meditation were used to enable people to better control their own breathing. Some of these remedies or breathing techniques are still being used today.

## Medicine and preventative measures

It wasn't until the mid-20th century that doctors realised asthma attacks were caused by the swelling and contraction of the airways. Consequently, in the last 40 years there have been many developments in the treatment of asthma. There are presently two main types of medicine: preventers and relievers. A preventer is used every day and reduces the swelling of the airways, cutting the risk of an attack. A reliever, such as Ventolin, is taken when breathing has become (or is going to become) difficult; this actually relaxes the muscles of the airways, reducing constriction and improving the airflow. The medicine is usually taken using an inhaler.

Prevention is also good treatment, so if you have asthma, remember to keep generally healthy, take regular exercise and lots of vitamin C to avoid colds and flu – which can be dangerous for asthma sufferers. A healthy diet is also important, and do watch what you eat, as certain foods or food additives can be asthma triggers.

By taking the right medication and making the right lifestyle choices, there is no reason why most asthma sufferers shouldn't be able to lead perfectly healthy and active lives.

## Famous sufferers

There have been many famous asthmatics past and present. These include:

Beethoven, Che Guevara, Benjamin Disraeli, Marcel Proust, Bob Hope and Martin Scorsese.

There are even asthmatic sporting heroes such as:

Dennis Rodman (basketball), Paul Scholes (football) and Paula Radcliffe (long-distance runner).

## The future

Unfortunately there is still no cure for asthma, although the development of new treatments has led to a much better quality of life for most sufferers. However, the number of people being diagnosed as asthmatic has increased dramatically over the past 20 years. This increase could be due to environmental or dietary factors, but for the moment researchers are puzzled.

It is not unusual for the symptoms of asthma to diminish as sufferers get older, although personally, after 27 years, I'm still waiting.

## Vocabulary

Five words/phrases from the text:

- swell: become bigger and rounder than normal
- coughing: forcing air out of the throat loudly and suddenly
- contagious: describes a disease passed by touching someone or their clothes
- remedies: things that cure you when you are ill
- inhaler: a small device for breathing in medicine

## Exercise one

Vocabulary gap fill. Now use the five words/phrases to fill the gaps in the sentences below:

Don't let anyone else use your towel. That eye problem is very .....<sup>[1]</sup>

I always carry my .....<sup>[2]</sup> with me in case I start getting short of breath.

The concert was spoiled because people kept .....<sup>[3]</sup> and we couldn't hear the music.

Garlic and lemon juice are homemade .....<sup>[4]</sup> for skin diseases.

His leg started to .....<sup>[5]</sup> when he was bitten by that insect.

## Exercise two

Comprehension: multiple choice. For each question choose the best answers:

- 1 Which of these is not a symptom of asthma?
  - a a strange noise when breathing
  - b a tight chest after exercise
  - c difficulty when swallowing food
- 2 Which of the following is a physical effect of an asthma attack?
  - a lungs expanding
  - b airways contracting
  - c pain in the throat
- 3 You are more likely to develop asthma if
  - a your parents have it
  - b you work with animals
  - c you do a lot of exercise
- 4 An asthma trigger is
  - a a medicine you should take when you have an attack
  - b something which causes an asthma attack
  - c a breathing technique
- 5 Over the last two decades the number of asthmatics has
  - a gone up
  - b gone down
  - c stayed the same

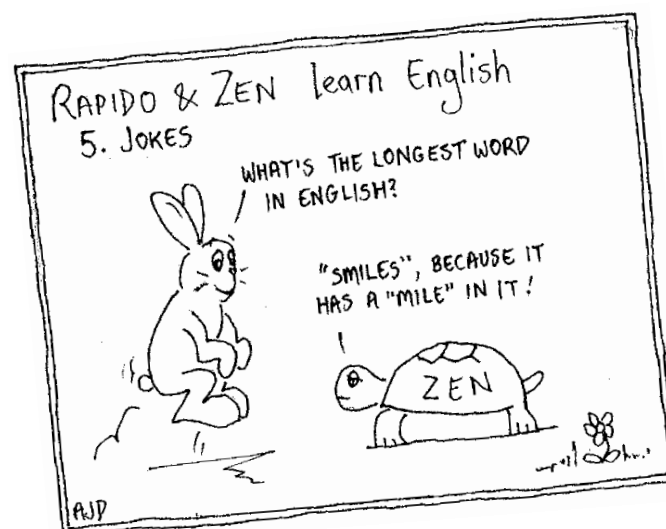
# Word search

B	R	V	T	E	J	R	E	L	A	H	N	I
O	M	G	Z	S	J	R	Q	J	K	H	E	U
K	C	A	T	T	A	Y	W	B	M	W	J	V
B	G	G	T	W	B	J	N	T	H	X	G	G
N	F	T	N	H	R	Q	O	T	S	V	P	C
Q	N	N	E	E	E	C	I	R	U	G	S	I
H	A	X	M	E	A	I	T	I	F	B	Z	T
W	X	H	T	Z	T	N	N	G	F	A	O	A
A	W	Q	A	I	H	O	E	G	E	A	B	M
L	H	M	E	N	I	R	V	E	R	C	P	H
Q	E	K	R	G	N	H	E	R	E	H	J	T
Q	O	D	T	X	G	C	R	S	R	G	S	S
U	J	E	F	A	J	V	P	R	S	U	N	A

See if you can find these words in the grid. They can be horizontal, vertical, diagonal and backwards.

## ASTHMATIC

- P\_EVE\_T\_O\_
- A\_TA\_K
- SUF\_ER\_RS
- BRE\_THI\_G
- TRE\_TM\_NT
- C\_RON\_C
- TRI\_G\_RS
- IN\_AL\_R
- W\_EE\_ING



# Joke teacher

Two oranges are running down the road when the first one suddenly stops. 'What's the matter?' asks the second orange. And the first one answers: 'I've run out of juice.'

In English, when we tell long jokes that are like a story, we tend to use the present tense. Look at the beginning and end of the joke below and see if you can complete the middle of the story.

Beginning: A man is at home watching television when there's a knock at the door. The man opens the door and finds a two-metre tall cockroach standing there.

End: ... so the man goes to the doctor and tells him what happened. And the doctor says: 'Yes, I'd heard there was a nasty bug going round.'

ANSWERS

Vocabulary

1 contagious

2 inhaler

3 coughing

4 remedies

5 swell

Comprehension

1 c

2 b

3 a

4 b

5 a