



# Supporting employees and candidates with asthma

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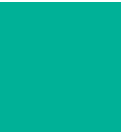


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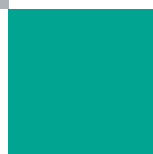
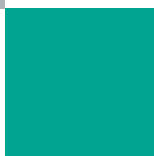
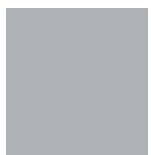
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# Making adjustments – top tips





# Introduction



## **This guide aims to give a general introduction to how asthma might impact someone at work and provide good practice tips on how to support them.**

Diagnosis, treatment and cultural perceptions of asthma may vary between countries. Similarly, legal requirements will also differ: in some countries, asthma may not be legally recognised as a disability whereas in other countries, people with asthma may be protected by local legislation.

Ensuring that you support your candidates and employees with asthma will help you create a more diverse workforce. It's often the case that when a line manager is confident managing a person with a disability or long-term condition, they become more effective managers for all employees.

## **Language**

### **Talking about asthma**

Language can be important in creating an open and inclusive workplace for people with asthma.

In this guide we use the term 'asthma' as it is widely understood. If in doubt, use the language that the individual uses to describe themselves and avoid placing 'labels' on employees.

## Talking about disability

In this guide, we use the term 'disabilities' as used by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD)<sup>[1]</sup> ratified by over 175 countries. The UN CRPD Article 1 provides a definition for 'persons with disabilities':

**“Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”**

In practice, this could include people with a wide range of impairments or conditions such as dyslexia, cancer, diabetes or asthma, to name just a few.

## Talking about adjustments

Adjustments (in some countries referred to as 'accommodations') remove or reduce the effect of the barriers experienced by candidates and employees with disabilities.

Examples of adjustments might include providing a ramp as an alternative to stairs or an electronic version of paper document so that an employee with a visual impairment can use screen reader software to access the information. Working hours and locations can be made flexible, and managers can agree different ways to communicate with their employees e.g. over the phone, via email, face-to-face or in writing.

These are small changes that can remove barriers that stop someone from doing their job and can support good performance. In this guide, we refer to these types of changes as 'adjustments'

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[1] United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: [un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html)

## What are respiratory conditions?

Respiratory conditions affect the respiratory system of an individual, from nose to lung.

Respiratory conditions impact different parts of the respiratory system when the supply of oxygen is compromised. Amongst the most well-known respiratory conditions are asthma, pneumonia, lung cancer, cystic fibrosis, sleep apnea, tuberculosis, pulmonary fibrosis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; many other conditions exist.

## What is asthma?

Asthma is an inflammatory condition of the airways. When someone with asthma encounters something they are allergic or sensitive to, their airways become narrower as the muscles around the airways tighten making it harder to breathe. A person experiencing an asthma attack will often experience coughing, wheezing and a tightening in the chest.

Although asthma is commonly regarded as a childhood condition, many adults have asthma and the symptoms of adult asthma are often more severe than those experienced by children.

**The symptoms of adult asthma are often more severe than those experienced by children.**





The majority of people with asthma will only experience attacks when exposed to a particular irritant or trigger. However, some people with chronic asthma will experience symptoms of coughing and breathlessness almost continuously, although the severity of these symptoms will vary. Common triggers include:

- Respiratory infections – such as colds, flu, or bronchitis.
- Allergens – substances which some people are allergic to, e.g. to pollen, foods, dust, moulds, feathers, animals fur, house-dust mites and some forms of medication.
- Irritants in the air – e.g. dirt, tobacco smoke, gases, chemical fumes and odours.
- Over-exertion – such as running too fast or carrying heavy loads.
- Climate and temperature – such as very cold air, windy weather, hot and humid weather, high ozone levels or sudden changes in weather.
- Emotional stress – such as anxiety, fear or excitement.

### **Managing workplace triggers**

Once you have identified the triggers that aggravate an employee's condition you can take steps to manage the premises and environment to prevent or reduce the employee's contact with them.

Below are listed some steps to control respiratory conditions caused by allergens. These will be beneficial to employees with asthma but also all those with conditions affecting their lung.

## **Dust and moulds**

- Use a dehumidifier to dry the air as this makes it harder for house-dust mites to survive, and can prevent growth of mould and mildew.
- Do not use brooms and brushes to dry sweep as it can cause high levels of air-borne dust. Instead use an industrial vacuum cleaner that has good suction and a filtered exhaust which does not scatter dust. Wipe all surfaces with a damp cloth and clean upholstery and soft furnishings using an anti-house dust wipe product.
- Where it is not possible to make changes to the whole work environment, discuss with the employee and seek occupational health advice to determine whether providing the employee with a partitioned workstation that is as dust free as possible is an option to consider.

## **Feathers or animal hair**

- Restrict the presence of animals to your premises except for working animals and assistance dogs for disabled people.
- Where it is not possible to remove animals from the workplace, protect the individual from exposure to the animal by designing animal facilities with local exhaust ventilation, providing segregated work and rest stations for vulnerable employees and restricting areas where the animal can go.

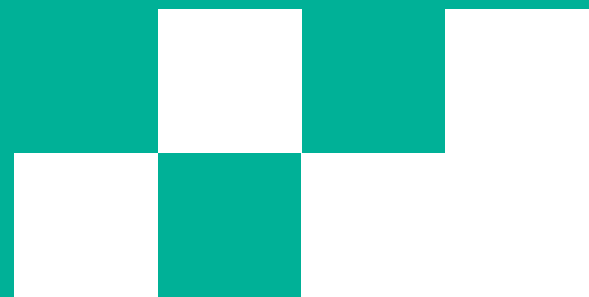
## **Food**

Allergies to certain fruit, nuts, shellfish, dairy products, eggs and food colourings are often associated with asthma and other respiratory conditions.

- Provide information about the food ingredients in your canteen or refreshment areas. Consult your employees and provide allergen free options wherever possible.

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11 to 30 are available in the  
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