

# TEN RULES FOR COPING WITH ASTHMA: THE PATIENT'S EXPERIENCE

## 1. Accept your asthma

To live with a chronic disease like asthma is not easy. Acceptance of your asthma as part of your life makes living easier for you. This means not being resigned to your situation.

## 2. Have respect for your breathing

You shouldn't smoke or allow others to smoke near you, at home, at school, at work, etc. you should measure your PEF regularly, use your medication and avoid triggers of asthma symptoms. Good indoor air quality is a right for all of us, especially asthmatics.

## 3. Make others respect your breathing

If you have asthma, demand that your rights are respected; if you don't have asthma but you live with people with asthma, you should respect their rights taking into consideration their problems and needs.

## 4. Improve your knowledge of the disease

Asthma is a chronic condition that normally lasts a lifetime. The disease can start at any age, and an attack can occur at any time. Symptoms vary from individual to individual: they can be moderate or even fatal, they can last a few minutes or several days. There are many triggers to which a person can be exposed. Therefore, the first step in coping with asthma is to understand how the disease is manifested at individual level.

## 5. Having a good partnership with your doctor

Generally speaking, if their disease is under control, people with asthma can lead a normal life. The role of doctors and national health services is crucial because it is essential to receive an early diagnosis and timely treatment, as well as information and education to keep asthma under control. This can be achieved only through an alliance between doctor and patient.

## 6. Take part in defining the therapeutic plan

Definition of the therapeutic plan is the crucial moment of the doctor/patient partnership. The doctor can help the patient understand how to keep asthma under control, what to do in a normal situation, in case of worsening of symptoms and in case of emergency. Patients must be partners in the treatment strategy, because they can use the

therapeutic plan to manage actively their disease.

## 7. Compliance

Very often, persistence or worsening of symptoms is a consequence only of inadequate compliance. Good compliance is the patient's responsibility, and patients should work hard to improve adherence to treatment and to prevention measures.

## 8. Undergo regular medical controls

Management of a chronic condition requires constant attentions. Asthma attacks can appear without warning. So medical controls should be regular also in attack-free periods, not only during an emergency.

## 9. Prevention

Asthma causes are not always clear. The doctor can help the patient to identify the trigger (or triggers) that can worsen the symptoms or induce an attack. It is important to know those factors because the person with asthma can avoid triggers, or take measures to reduce the risk. General rules are:

- Keep a diary of your symptoms.
- Have a 'flu shot each year.
- Stop smoking and avoid places where smoking is allowed.
- Follow the advice of your doctor to avoid triggers.

## 10. Join a patient's association

Asthma patients' associations can help you improve your knowledge about your disease. They publish newsletters, magazines, leaflets etc. that give patients up-to-date information. Some organize meetings and educational programmes where patients can share their experiences with people that have the same concerns, and can meet experts.

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