

Lung Health

How can you improve your lung health?



One person in every seven in the UK is affected by lung disease – this equates to approximately 8 million people.

The lungs are required to draw oxygen from the air and transfer it into the blood stream for delivery to the organs around the body. About 10,000 litres of air move in and out of the lungs every day and germs and foreign bodies can move in with it. The lungs provide a complex defence system both physically and chemically to prevent unwanted material from entering the body.

Be active

Exercise strengthens the muscles around the lungs, better enabling them to expand and send oxygen around the body.



Eat healthily

A balanced diet will help the body fight off chest infections as well as maintain a healthy weight which is important for the lungs.



Stay smoke-free

Tobacco smoke is a leading cause of lung disease as it causes irreparable damage to the lungs and airways. Passive smoking is also harmful.



Get coughs checked

A persistent cough for more than a month could be an early warning sign of lung diseases such as COPD, TB and lung cancer. Don't ignore or dismiss a cough, go and speak to your GP.



Ventilate rooms

Damp conditions and indoor pollutants such as animal dusts, mildew and chemicals contained in certain household products irritate the lungs and airways.



Lung Health

Allergies and asthma

Allergies

Some people become ill after contact with substances which have no effect on most other people. This is called an allergic reaction. Or you can say that the person has 'an allergy' to the substance. You can have an allergic reaction if you breathe in, eat or have physical contact with the substance you are allergic to.

An allergic reaction can show itself in different ways, such as:

- sneezing
- an itchy or runny nose
- red eyes
- breathing problems and coughing
- common skin problems such as hives or eczema

The substances which cause these reactions are known as allergens. Common examples of allergens that affect the lungs include:

- pollen from grass and trees
- house dust mites
- animal fur

Some allergies can cause problems all through the year. Others, called seasonal allergies, only affect us at certain times.

Allergens that cause problems only at certain times of the year include: pollen from trees (springtime), grass (high summer) or weeds (late summer). Some plants may produce mould spores which can cause allergy in late summer and autumn.

By far the most common allergy in the UK is to grass pollen: it's called summer hayfever, or 'seasonal allergic rhinitis'. Hayfever usually causes:

- itching
- sneezing
- a runny or blocked nose
- sore eyes
- an itchy palate
- breathing problems

Levels of pollen in the air vary depending on the weather. They can increase a lot on dry, sunny days.



Asthma

Asthma is a common long-term disease affecting over 5.2 million people in the UK. On average, 1,500 people die from asthma each year in the UK. There are certain 'triggers' that can cause asthma to deteriorate:

- Viral or bacterial infections
- Inhaling certain allergens (pollen, fungal spores, house dust mites)
- Seasonal changes
- Some medicines (beta-blockers, aspirin & NSAIDS such as ibuprofen)
- Sulfiting agents (used in wine, beer and to keep greens fresh in salad bars)
- Strong smells and perfumes
- Exercise (especially if cold)
- Irritants (vehicle, solvent or cleaning product fumes, tobacco smoke)
- Pollution
- Alcohol
- Foods such as nuts, shellfish or food additives such as tartrazine
- Emotion (anger, anxiety, happiness)

Sufferers will become aware of what usually triggers their asthma and can avoid certain environments as part of their self management.