



Asthma

In an asthma attack the muscles of the air passages in the lungs go into spasm and the linings of the airways swell. As a result, the airways become narrowed and breathing becomes difficult.

Sometimes there is a specific trigger for an asthma attack such as:

- an allergy
- a cold
- cigarette smoke
- extremes of temperature
- exercise

Individuals with asthma usually deal well with their own attacks by using a blue Salbutamol inhaler, however you may be required to assist someone having an asthma attack or having an attack for the first time.

Recognition features

- Difficulty in breathing, with a very prolonged breathing-out phase.

There may also be:

- wheezing as the casualty breathes out
- difficulty speaking and whispering
- distress and anxiety
- coughing
- features of hypoxia, such as a grey-blue tinge to the lips, earlobes and nail beds (cyanosis).

Treatment

Your aims during an asthma attack are to ease the breathing and if necessary, get medical help. Sit the individual with their back straight, supported by a chair and upright to keep their airways open. You need to keep them calm and reassure them. Encourage them to breathe slowly and deeply. If they have a salbutamol inhaler, then encourage them to use it. The student can have 10 puffs of the inhaler. Children may have a spacer device and you should encourage them to use that with their inhaler also. It should relieve the attack within a few minutes.

Encourage the person to sit in a position that they find most comfortable, often leaning forward with arms resting on a table or the back of a chair. Do not lie the casualty down. A mild asthma attack should ease within three minutes but if it doesn't encourage the individual to use their inhaler again. You can give 10 puffs of Salbutamol every 5 – 10 minutes until an ambulance arrives if needed. Do not allow them to slope forwards and encourage the them to continue talking to you to ensure that their consciousness remains.

If this is the first attack, or if the attack is severe and any one of the following occurs:

- The inhaler has no effect after five minutes
- The individual is becoming worse
- Breathlessness makes talking difficult
- The casualty becomes exhausted.

Dial 999 (or 112) for an ambulance.

Encourage the individual to use their inhaler every five to 10 minutes.

Monitor and record the breathing and pulse rate every 10 minutes.

If the individual becomes unconscious open the airway and check their breathing and be prepared to give emergency aid – CPR.