

View this article online at: [patient.info/news-and-features/how-to-keep-your-lungs-healthy-for-life](https://patient.info/news-and-features/how-to-keep-your-lungs-healthy-for-life)

## How to keep your lungs healthy for life

Most of us take our lungs for granted until they start causing problems. If you have any lung condition, you can't afford to ignore pollution.

There are many conditions that can affect your lungs, and the most common are asthma and [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease](#) (COPD), chronic lung damage usually (but not always) down to cigarettesmoking. If you have the inherited condition alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency or bronchiectasis, which cause chronic lung damage even without smoking, you need to pay special attention to any potential outside influences that may cause further problems.

[Asthma](#) is closely linked to other allergic conditions like [hay fever](#), and many sufferers find their symptoms are worse in summer, when pollen counts are high. But for the three million COPD sufferers in the UK, it's the advent of winter that brings a special misery. That's largely because many flare-ups of COPD are down to chest infections, which are much more common in the winter months.

In winter it's worth thinking about the steps you can take to protect your lungs. [Stopping smoking](#) goes without saying. So does taking any medication (including inhalers) you're prescribed regularly. But many of us underestimate the effect air pollution can have on our health.

If you've ever smoked and suffer from frequent coughs, ask your GP about a breathing test called spirometry to check your lungs. But many of us underestimate the effect air pollution can have on our health.

## How does air pollution affect our lungs?

In fact, it's not just people with lung problems who need to take [air pollution](#) seriously. Heart conditions, including [heart failure](#), can affect your ability to breathe. So can simply being a little frail. In the long term, it has even been linked to a higher risk of some cancers. So really, air pollution is everyone's problem.

Perhaps the first thing to point out is that pollution isn't an excuse to stay indoors with the windows shut all year. The benefit to your lungs and heart from regular exercise vastly outweighs the harm from pollution. But you do need to take sensible precautions to keep your lungs healthy.

## Tips for healthy lungs

Firstly, get into the habit of finding out what pollution levels are on a day-to-day basis. Levels can vary dramatically depending on where you are and what the weather's like. It's time to use your tech savvy to keep up to date. The Met Office has hundreds of weather stations all across the country which put out daily reports not just on the chance of rain but also on air pollution levels. A simple Google search will give you more details. Alternatively, proving that DEFRA isn't just for farmers and vets, you can try their countrywide forecast.

Once you know what pollution levels are on any given day, take them into account. If you have heart or lung problems, consider putting off any strenuous outdoor activity until levels are lower. As soon as you start exercising, you breathe harder and faster, usually through your mouth. This means you take in more air and don't filter pollution out through your nose in the same way. Breathing exercises are also an easy and effective way to improve your lung health.

When you do go out, plan your trip as much as possible to avoid busy roads. Pollution levels drop sharply even a couple of metres away from heavy traffic. Pollution builds up easily in built-up areas full of tall buildings, where air can't circulate.

## Where do my medicines come in?

If you take [inhalers](#), make sure you take them really regularly and order your repeat prescription well in advance. If you have COPD, your doctor may give you a 'rescue pack' of medicines to take if you get a cough - don't run out. If you do exercises at home, don't do them too soon after cleaning. Both [air fresheners](#) and vacuuming can affect air quality.

## What should I look out for?

As for symptoms to look out for, breathlessness or wheezing are the big concerns. But do be aware that irritation in your throat and nose, as well as coughing more, can both be linked to air pollution. Of course, in an ideal world, we'd all live in the middle of the countryside, where pollution isn't an issue. But getting your exercise from a regular walk in the park can help your heart, lungs and general fitness without running the risk of undermining your good work.

*With thanks to 'My Weekly' magazine where this article was originally published.*

**Disclaimer:** This article is for information only and should not be used for the diagnosis or treatment of medical conditions. Egton Medical Information Systems Limited has used all reasonable care in compiling the information but makes no warranty as to its accuracy. Consult a doctor or other healthcare professional for diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions. For details see our [conditions](#).

<b>Last updated by:</b> Dr Sarah Jarvis MBE, FRCGP 26/03/2019	
<b>Peer reviewed by:</b> Dr Colin Tidy, MRCGP 26/03/2019	

View this article online at: [patient.info/news-and-features/how-to-keep-your-lungs-healthy-for-life](http://patient.info/news-and-features/how-to-keep-your-lungs-healthy-for-life)

Discuss How to keep your lungs healthy for life and find more trusted resources at [Patient](#).



To find out more visit [www.patientaccess.com](http://www.patientaccess.com)  
or download the app



Follow us

