

# Hidden disabilities

## Asthma



### Reasonable Adjustments



Approximately 5 million people in the UK have asthma.

**Asthma involves a narrowing of the airways of the lungs due to tension or spasm of the muscles in the bronchial walls.**

It can be triggered by various factors including:

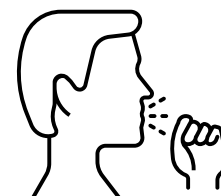
- allergies (e.g. to animals or house-dust mites);
- irritants (e.g. cigarette smoke, chemical fumes, aspirin and other drugs, air fresheners and furniture polish);
- viral infections (colds or flu); and, exercise, stress or excitement.



Poor ventilation, damp, and building work can aggravate these factors.

The symptoms, which vary from very mild to very severe, include;

- Tightness in the chest.
- Shortness of breath.
- Coughing and wheezing.
- Fatigue.
- In severe cases, cessation of breathing.



An asthma attack can seem to occur very suddenly, and symptoms can become progressively worse if untreated.

Asthma is usually controlled by minimising contact with triggers and use of medication

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It is estimated that 3000 people per year develop “occupational asthma”.

**Early diagnosis is important as is it potentially curable.**

This is triggered in people who did not previously have asthma, by breathing in substances at work.

Common causes are wood dust, latex, and flour dust.

High-risk occupations include health workers, spray-painters, people working with chemicals or in the baking and flour industry.



Disability law guidance says it can be a substantial adverse effect if an impairment makes an activity more than usually fatiguing, so that a person might not be able to repeat the task over a sustained period of time.

**Other examples, of factors likely to be seen as having a substantial adverse effect are:**

- difficulty in going up or down steps, stairs or gradients;
- an ability to walk only a short distance without difficulty;
- the worker only having asthma at work, e.g. because of a smoky atmosphere, but recovers when at home; and
- the worker behaving in a way which aggravates their asthma, e.g. by owning a cat.



As always, the test of disability in law is the effect if the worker were not using any medication.

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**Work Place Reasonable Adjustments: what you and your colleagues can do at your workplace**



**The employer should consult the worker about triggers and take steps to avoid them. Triggers can be avoided by taking a variety of actions.**

**1. Provide a clean, smoke-free work environment.**



**2. Use non-toxic and unperfumed cleaning products and office supplies.**



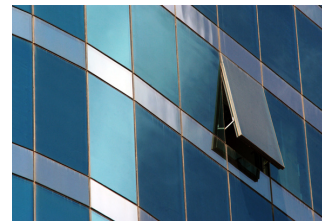
**3. Relocate the worker if there are building or repair works causing dust.**

**4. Relocate the worker away from irritants.**

**5. Control humidity, hot and cold air through installation of air conditioners, humidifiers and heaters if the worker is sensitive to those things.**



**6. Enable access to fresh air by means of windows which open and the provision of additional rest breaks.**



**7. Exposure to known causes of occupational asthma should be avoided by special equipment, cleaning, supervising and training.**



**8. If the worker finds movement difficult, consider providing ground floor working, lifts, accessible parking spaces or the ability to work from home.**

