



# Sensitive Choice<sup>®</sup>

## Key Australian asthma and allergy information

### What is asthma?

- Asthma is a disease of the airways, the small tubes that carry air in and out of the lungs
- When you have asthma symptoms the muscles in the airways tighten and the lining of the airways swells and produces sticky mucus.
- Symptoms include coughing, wheezing, chest tightness and shortness of breath
- Most people with asthma only get symptoms when they inhale a trigger that irritates their airways, exercise without the right preparation, or catch a cold
- Asthma tends to run in families

### Common asthma triggers

The many triggers for asthma can be different for different people. Common triggers are:

- Allergy-related triggers, e.g. house dust mites, pollens, animal fur, mould
- Cigarette smoke
- Viral infections (such as the common cold and flu)
- Weather, e.g., cold air, change in temperature, thunderstorm or weather changes
- Work-related triggers (e.g. wood dust, chemicals, metal salts)
- Some food additives and exercise
- Certain medicines (e.g. aspirin, some blood pressure drugs)

### Treating asthma

Asthma isn't yet curable, but it can be managed.

- Medications are the mainstay of asthma management
- All people with asthma should have a reliever inhaler (puffer) to use when their symptoms flare up
- Some people also have preventer medication they take every day
- With good management, people with asthma can lead normal, active lives.

### What are allergies?

- Allergy is when your body reacts to things that don't affect other people and those things are called allergens
- Allergens are found in house dust mites, pets, pollen, insects, moulds, foods and some medicines.
- Atopy is the genetic (inherited) tendency to develop allergic diseases. People with atopy are said to be atopic.
- If an atopic person is exposed to allergens they can develop an immune reaction that leads to allergic inflammation (redness and swelling).
- Symptoms/reactions include hay fever (allergic rhinitis /conjunctivitis), eczema, hives (urticaria) and asthma
- A substance that is an allergen for one person may not be for another – everyone reacts differently.
- The likelihood (or risk) of developing allergies is increased if other family members suffer from allergy or asthma.



# Sensitive Choice<sup>®</sup>

## Facts & Figures

### Asthma:

- For 2007–08, the prevalence of current asthma in Australia was estimated about one in ten (9.9%), equivalent to about 2 million people\*
- Asthma remains a significant health problem in Australia, with prevalence rates that are high by international comparison.\*
- Since 2001, the prevalence of current asthma has declined in children and young adults but remained stable in adults aged 35 years and over.\*
- Among those aged 0–14 years, current asthma is more common among males than females, but among those aged 15 years and over, the reverse is true.\*
- Asthma commonly coexists with other chronic conditions, such as rhinitis and sinusitis.\*
- People with asthma rate their health worse than do people without the condition and report more anxiety and depression – this is common for many chronic diseases\*
- There were 416 deaths attributed to asthma as the underlying cause in 2010, with the risk highest in the elderly.\*
- Nearly 10% of adult-onset asthma is caused by occupational exposures and, hence, could be avoided if exposure to triggering agents in the workplace were removed.\*

### Allergy:

- Around 8 in 10 people with asthma have positive allergy test results. #
- Around 40% of the population are atopic. #
- Around 1 in 3 people will develop allergies some time during their life. #
- 19.6% of the population has at least one allergy ∞
- Around 15% of the population has allergic rhinitis (the most common allergic condition) †
- On average an allergic person has 1.74 allergies ∞

### Common allergens:

The most common causes of allergic reactions in Australia are: #

- Dust mites (the most common allergen)
- Pollen
- Cats and other furry or hairy animals such as dogs, horses, rabbits and guinea pigs
- Foods such as peanuts, cow's milk, soy, seafood and eggs
- Insect stings
- Moulds
- Medicines

### Sources:

\* *Asthma in Australia 2011* – Australian Centre for Asthma Monitoring,

# Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy

∞ *The Economic Impact Of Allergic Disease* – Access Economics in conjunction with the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (2007)

† ABS 2007-08 National Health Survey