

Speaking from Experience Asthma in Adults

Transcript for chapter 6 of 12: Life threatening attacks

Margaret and Michael: I didn't find the asthma unpredictable at first because it was just, I would get a cold, then get a cough, and get a wheeze - that sort of scenario. It wasn't until we had a full-on major attack that it then became scary. Because you realised that all of a sudden, it could happen without you knowing it was going to happen.

De: About three years ago I was at a party, and the food was chilli con carne - it was a sort of barbeque. Somebody gave me a plate of this and I took mouthful number one of rice, and collapsed over the sink - turned absolutely blue. I could hear vaguely what was going on around me, and I realised that nobody noticed.

Margaret and Michael: That was really frightening, because it was very quick, and I didn't have a chance to know what was going on. And just the whole ambulance routine and everything - we hadn't gone through that before. So, my parents were frightened, as I was at home at the time. My mum and dad were very frightened. So it wasn't a situation of: "We know what to do, let's just act upon it." Everyone was a bit nervy.

De: Then, somebody noticed what was happening to me, and grabbed me and dragged me out of the back door and out of the kitchen. They then threw me across the bonnet of a car outside the house and threw some ventolin into my mouth, because they happened to have an asthmatic daughter and they always carried it. But yes, that was a very, very close shave indeed. I'm told that by the time I got to the car I was completely unconscious.

Arthur: I never had that. I was puffing and blowing and coughing and wheezing, but it was for fairly short periods.

Glenda: My husband was a pilot in the air force and he was away a lot. This particular night I woke up and I had a dreadful attack of asthma. I had an eighteen month-old baby in his cot. I couldn't even get into him, and I knew I couldn't do anything. It took me an hour and a half to call out from my bedroom to the back veranda, because I knew the lady next door hung out her washing and I thought she would see me, which she did, thankfully. And she came tearing over, took the baby, and rang the doctor. We didn't have phones, so she rang the doctor. He came out and gave me adrenalin. But in those days they didn't put you into hospital with asthma. They just gave you adrenalin, which I suppose fixed it, but it had a dreadful effect on the heart and the well-being. That really scared me because I was so ill and it wasn't only me, it was the baby. But now with this new medication, you can control it. I mean, occasionally yes, things get bad. But you can control it enough so that it will get bad slowly, usually, and you can do something about it.

Margaret and Michael: Once it gets to the point where I can take puffers, and in the past using nebulisers, and I can't get any relief from them - I'm taking them on top of each other - I know that it's time to do something. I guess the majority of times I've been sent to the hospital from the doctor's surgery, because I've realised that I'm going to have to see a doctor.

John: We were very competitive on the court, came off the court, and we were sitting there and I started to wheeze again. So I took some more ventolin. Then they all said, "Come on, we're going to the pub." And I said, "No, I think I'd better drive home. I'm not feeling the best." And I remember I got about as far as Carlton, and I'd gone, in that sense... I knew I needed help. I swung around the corner and parked outside St Vincent's, and went through the door and collapsed. The fear that that genders is quite horrific because if you don't get help you are going to die.

Leisl: A couple of times I thought, "Am I going to get through this? Is this going to be the end?" And the other thing is I get very tachycardic, which is when your heart races flat out.

John: If I can breathe out - it's not so much breathing in, it's breathing out. If you can get that message across to them, then it's far less frightening I think.

Margaret and Michael: In those situations when you're rushed into the hospital, they take you into an emergency room and they put every sort of monitor onto you that they possibly have. There are lots of doctors around and lots of nurses. It must look scary, that's the thing that probably comes to mind for me. Because I know that while I'm breathing I'm okay, so it's letting Mick know that I'm okay is probably at the forefront in my mind.

John: There is no finer point in my life which is the opposite of that fear and panic and terror, than the point when you start coming back in casualty.

Leisl: It is an extremely scary feeling and I remember just being dizzy and struggling for every single breath and listening to them talking about my SATS. But what I actually do in that situation - because you've usually got a lot of staff and nurses around you and mum and dad are there - I put my headphones on and I try, no matter how hard it is, to do relaxation and even meditation and try and calm my breathing. Because what can happen in a severe attack is you can hyper-ventilate, which can make the attack a lot worse.

John: And suddenly you can breathe and suddenly it's okay again.

Margaret and Michael: It is a worrying time of course, because you really don't know what's going to happen. However, the fact is you're dealing with an illness that a lot is known about, and there are a lot of things that can be done in those situations. So I think the key is the fact that you get the medical attention quickly and you have faith in that improving the situation quickly. I mean, we find too though, when you've gone through those situations, it's not as though it's a magic button that someone pushes and you're right again. I mean, you're quite weak afterwards, after a severe attack.

Margaret and Michael: It takes quite a while to get back to strength.