

# Children with asthma at-risk for mental health issues

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(Medical Xpress)—A new study has found that young children with severe or persistent asthma are at higher risk of developing many common mental health problems.

The [research](#), a collaboration between researchers at The University of Western Australia affiliated Telethon Institute for Child Health Research and Columbia University in New York, has been published online in the top international journal [Psychological Medicine](#).

UWA psychologist and report co-author Dr Monique Robinson said the findings build on previous studies which have found that as the severity of [asthma](#) increases, so do problems such as [anxiety and depression](#).

"We were interested in understanding the link between asthma in [early childhood](#) and [mental health problems](#) later on as little is known about the relationship," Dr Robinson said.

"We looked at whether the link was present for mild as well as severe asthma, and whether the link depended on [asthma symptoms](#) being persistent throughout childhood as opposed to asthma that lessens as the child grows older."

The study used Western Australian data from the [Raine Study](#) to determine whether children who had asthma at age 5 were vulnerable for later mental health problems through to the age of 17 years.

The research team found that having asthma at age five was associated with a higher vulnerability for the later development of problems such as anxiety, conduct problems and affective problems.

When the children with asthma were separated into groups depending on the severity of their condition, children with [mild asthma](#) were no different to those without asthma in terms of mental health outcomes, but children with severe or persistent asthma were seen to be the most at risk of future mental health problems.

"The link with mental health was not present when children had asthma early in life but grew out of it by later childhood. However, children whose asthma developed later in childhood were at risk for internalizing mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, somatic problems but not externalizing problems like behavior issues," Dr Robinson said.

"We did find that as children got older, the likelihood that they would experience a mental health problem decreased, perhaps indicating that as children get older they are better able to adjust to their asthma without experiencing psychological difficulties."

Dr Robinson said that it probably wasn't asthma itself that caused mental health problems, but rather the added challenges for the child of dealing with a chronic disease.

She said the study supports the need to assess psychological functioning as part of routine care for children with a chronic or severe disease, including for those with severe and [persistent asthma](#) throughout childhood.

Provided by University of Western Australia

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