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LawTalk Blog



What is baker's lung? Am I entitled to compensation?

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At Andersons, we work closely with diverse clients from many callings. Today, we will focus on a [workplace injury](#) specific to one type of exposure.

Baker's lung is a respiratory disorder and a form of occupational asthma. A person can be affected by baker's lung if they breathe in airborne flour, dust or other substances often and over a long period of time. As its name suggests, it is a dust disease often suffered by bakers.

Do I have the symptoms that could indicate baker's lung?

Sufferers of baker's lung will often get symptoms similar to regular asthma. These can include:

- Coughing
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Chest tightness

The symptoms can affect people differently. They may impact you immediately or even after years of performing the same work under the same workplace conditions.

A tell-tale sign of occupational asthma is when symptoms appear and increase during the working week and subside during the weekends, holidays or time away from the workplace. Your health specialist will be able to confirm whether your symptoms are related to baker's lung or another respiratory condition.

What causes baker's lung?

Baker's lung is caused by continuously breathing in airborne substances; most commonly found in bakeries.

Substances known to cause baker's lung include:

- Flour and grains, including wheat, rye, barley, soy, buckwheat, cereal grains;
- Additives and enzymes, for example alpha amylase; or
- Other allergens such as yeast, eggs or egg powder, sesame seeds, nuts, mites and moulds.

Many other substances relating to other occupations have also been known to produce asthma in people who have never had it before. Other occupations which may be at risk include farmers, carpenters, saw mill workers, welders or paint sprayers.

I work with these substances. How can I prevent baker's lung?

In South Australia, the [Work Health and Safety Act 2012](#) (SA) sets safety standards for workplaces. Your employer is required by law to keep exposure to airborne substances in the workplace as low as is reasonably practicable and within stipulated limits.

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Quite simply, baker's lung can be prevented by eliminating or reducing the level of flour dust, additives and other asthma-causing agents breathed in by employees.

As an employee, you can learn about the hazards in your workplace by speaking to the health and safety representative or your employer and follow all safe work practices to reduce dusts, including the wearing of PPE (personal protective equipment) when necessary.

What compensation might I be entitled to if I am diagnosed with baker's lung?

Baker's lung and other occupational asthma can affect your overall wellbeing and even threaten your life. It is your employer's responsibility to protect you from contracting it in the workplace.

You may be entitled to workers compensation through Return to Work (the South Australian state based workers compensation scheme) or Comcare (the Australian federal workers compensation scheme) if you suffer from these symptoms and believe your workplace caused the injury. We recommend you contact today's blog writer, Kate Keough, who will be happy to work with you to investigate potential avenues for compensation.

Research for this article was undertaken by Legal Intern, [Alex Lazar](#).

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