

FACT SHEET

Asthma and Environmental Triggers*

*Triggers are things in the environment that can cause or worsen asthma.

While scientists are trying to find out what causes asthma, it is well known that many different things in the environment can trigger asthma symptoms. Not all asthma triggers are the same for every person with asthma. People with asthma need to find out what things affect them and take steps to stay away from these triggers.

Asthma symptoms can be triggered if you smoke or someone with asthma is around smoke. In addition, there is some evidence that young children exposed to smoke in their first year of life are at more risk of developing asthma. To decrease exposure to smoke, you can do the following:



- If you smoke, quit.
- Do not smoke in your home or car and do not allow others to do so.
- Do not smoke around children.

Dust Mites

Dust mites can be found in every home but are too small to be seen. They live in mattresses, pillows, carpets, fabric-covered furniture, bed covers, stuffed toys and clothes. To decrease exposure to dust mites you can do the following:



- Wash sheets and blankets once a week in hot water
- Choose washable stuffed toys, wash them often in hot water, and dry very well. Keep stuffed toys off beds.
- Cover mattresses and pillows in dust-proof zippered covers.

Pets

Skin flakes, urine and saliva from pets can be asthma triggers for some people. You can do the following to decrease exposure to pet allergens:



- Consider keeping pets outdoors or even finding a new home for your pets, if necessary.
- Keep pets out of the bedroom and other sleeping areas at all times, and keep the door closed.
- Keep pets away from fabric-covered furniture, carpets and stuffed toys.

Pests

Body parts and droppings from pests like cockroaches and rodents can be asthma triggers. You can decrease exposure to these by doing the following:

- Do not leave food or garbage out.
- Store food in airtight containers.
- Clean all food crumbs or spilled liquids right away.
- Try using boric acid powder (for ants/cockroaches) or traps.
Caulk and seal all holes and cracks.



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Mold

Damp and/or water damaged areas can grow mold. To decrease the chance for mold to grow, moisture and extra water must be decreased. To decrease mold growth you can do the following:



- Fix all leaky plumbing and other places where water can get into the home.
- Wash mold from surfaces and dry very well. Carpeting and other things that cannot be dried well may need to be replaced.
- Keep drip pans in air conditioning units, refrigerator and dehumidifier dry and clean.
- Vent the clothes dryer to the outside.
- Use exhaust fans or open windows in bathrooms and kitchens when showering, cooking or using the dishwasher.

Weather Changes

Cold, dry air, very hot weather, change in seasons, or a sudden change in weather conditions can cause an asthma attack. To help prevent this:

- Cover the nose and mouth with a scarf on cold or windy days.
- Use an air conditioner or go to places that are air-conditioned.
- Know the weather forecast.
- Do not do a lot of activities during very hot or cold weather.



Allergies

Some people are allergic to certain things such as pollen, trees, fresh cut grass and foods. To prevent an asthma attack:



- Stay indoors and close windows; use an air conditioner if possible.
- Stay away from foods such as chocolate, eggs, nuts, and peanut butter.

Strong odors and sprays

The presence of strong smells can be a trigger for an asthma attack. To avoid this:

- Try to stay away from perfumes, talcum powder, hair spray and paints.
- Do not use strong smelling cleaning agents.

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Exercise

Asthma attacks can sometimes be triggered by exercise. To avoid this:

- Warm up for 6-10 minutes before exercising.
- Limit outdoor exercise when the air pollution/pollen levels are high.
- Talk with a health care provider about taking medicine prior to planned exercise.



Stress/excitement

Emotions such as fear, anger, frustration, crying, laughing too hard can be an asthma trigger. To deal with this:

- Learn how to calm down fast.
- Try slow breathing



Respiratory Infections such as colds, the flu or bronchitis can also be an asthma trigger. Be sure to:

- Get a yearly flu shot.
- Stay away from people with colds.
- Wash hands regularly, especially during the cold and flu season.
- Talk to your health care provider about treating your asthma during the first signs of a respiratory infection.

If you have questions or would like more information, please contact:

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