



## Controlling Asthma Triggers

An important way to reduce the severity and frequency of your acute asthma attacks is to avoid allergens and irritants that make you wheeze. Your Asthma & Allergy Center doctor and nursing staff will help you identify these "triggers." These guidelines suggest ways to reduce your exposure to them.

### Get a handle on Dust and Mold

- Keep your home clean and free of dust and mold, paying special attention to your bedroom. Use simple window treatments.
- Arrange your furniture so it can be easily dusted. Store loose items in drawers, closets, or boxes.
- A bare wood or tile floor is preferable to carpeting. A thickly waxed hardwood floor, for example, can easily be wiped free of dust. Wash area rugs often.
- Choose synthetic fibers for clothes, drapes, and rugs. Natural fibers are harder to keep dust-free. Launder sheets and blankets in water at least 120° F.
- Washable blankets and comforters are easy to keep dust-free. Cover the mattress and pillows with allergy free encasements.
- Your home should be vacuumed and your bedroom dusted frequently. The vacuum should have a HEPA exhaust filter and double holding bags. Cleaning fluids--in addition to dust and dirt--can aggravate asthma.
- Get rid of stuffed animals or place them in plastic bags for storage. Replace them with toys made of plastic, nylon, or polyester. Freeze or wash favorite stuffed animals weekly.
- If you have a forced-air heating system, a special filter may be useful. Place a cut piece of furnace filter over the outflow vents in the bedroom. Or, close the ducts to your bedroom and use an electric heater instead.
- Before purchasing an expensive air conditioner or purifier, discuss its potential benefits with your allergy team. If you already have an air conditioner, check it regularly for mold growth. Have the filter cleaned frequently, and spray the filter with a ( 1:20 ) aerosol solution of chlorine bleach added to water and small amount of detergent to kill mold.
- Mold tends to accumulate in bathrooms, so have tiles and grout cleaned frequently. Moisture is likely to collect behind the toilet and under the sink; therefore, these areas should also be cleaned regularly.
- Check houseplants and dried flowers regularly for mold growth. If you have severe mold allergy, hydroponic plants (plants grown in water instead of soil) may be better for you. A dilute solution of Lysol and water (concentration 1:20 ) in the soil may be run through the plants to decrease mold growth.

- Cockroaches are unwelcome for anyone, especially someone with asthma. There are hundreds you do not see for every one you do see. They live in the walls, in cracks and in crevices and many times live and die out of sight. This makes them much more difficult to clean up. Over time, dead cockroaches turn into dust and are inhaled.
- When showering or bathing, use exhaust fan to decrease humidity in bathroom.
- Keep your home's relative humidity between 30-50%. Use dehumidifier if necessary.
- Check and change mechanical air filters monthly.
- Dust and remove books.

#### Avoid Animal Dander

- Try to find a new home for your hairy or feathered pet. If you just cannot part with your pet, keep it in the garage or yard or on the porch. At the very least, keep it out of the rooms where you spend most of your time. Wash hands and face after playing with your pet.
- Wash the animal with water once per week to reduce the dander load of the animal.
- Do not expect immediate relief of your symptoms. Often, it takes months for animal dander to disappear once you have removed a pet from your home.
- There are no species of hairy or feather animals that do not have dander.
- Not only is the dander a trigger for asthma, but also the urine and saliva of the animal.

#### Steer Clear of Indoor Pollutants

- Stay away from tobacco fumes, which irritate your airways. Do not smoke, and be assertive to others: Tobacco smoke is one of the most dangerous asthma triggers. People with asthma should not smoke cigarettes or cigars. Second hand smoke is also dangerous. Studies show that if someone in the house smokes, other family members with asthma have longer and more frequent asthma episodes. Insist that smokers put out their cigarettes when they are near you.
- Avoid strong perfumes, hair spray, paint fumes, wood burning stoves, and cooking odors, which can aggravate asthma. Use scent-free chemicals for cleaning.
- BEWARE OF POLLEN AND OUTDOOR POLLUTION
- During the pollen season (spring, summer, or early fall, depending on which pollens affect you), stay away from woods and fields where pollen concentration is the highest.
- If you are allergic to ragweed, don't bring related plants, such as chrysanthemums, dahlias, and daisies into your home or workplace.
- On hot, sunny, windy days, when pollen concentration is high, you may be most comfortable in an air-conditioned room.
- You can obtain information on pollen by calling our local pollen line at (402) 255-3878 for current pollen information or the National Allergy Bureau at 1-800-9POLLEN or visit our web site, [www.asthmaandallergycenter.com](http://www.asthmaandallergycenter.com)
- When air pollution reaches high concentrations, your asthma may get worse. So stay indoors during periods of high levels of particulates, carbon monoxide, ozone, and other air pollutants.
- Keep doors and windows closed.

- Do not hang clothes outside to dry. Pollens and mold spores collect on the line dried clothes.
- If you are outside during the day for a long period, wash your hair at night before going to bed.

#### Watch out for certain Foods or Drugs

Some persons are sensitive to chemicals called sulfites, which are added to many foods and some medications as preservatives. The Food and Drug Administration recommends that restaurants and grocery stores warn consumers when products contain sulfites. Below are listed some common food sources of sulfites:

- Pre-cut lettuce
- Pre-cut fruit
- White grapes
- Maraschino cherries
- Fresh mushrooms
- Wet-milled corn
- Dehydrated foods for camping
- Dehydrated potatoes
- Guacamole
- Shrimp
- Conditioned dough
- Beet sugar
- Wine and beer

Aspirin and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory pain relievers, worsen your asthma if you are part of a small percent of asthmatics who are aspirin-sensitive. Check the labels on over-the-counter drugs to see whether products you are considering to buy contain aspirin. Other pain killers that aggravate asthma in some people include: ibuprofen, indomethacin, and naproxen. However, acetaminophen can usually be taken in recommended doses without problems.

#### CONSIDER THESE OTHER PRECAUTIONS

Any illness, especially infections of the throat, sinuses, nose and lungs can worsen asthma. So get prompt medical care when you are sick.

If your asthma is triggered by exercise, ask your Asthma & Allergy Center doctor about using one of your medicines 15 to 30 minutes before activity to prevent wheezing. There are now longer acting medications that can block exercise-induced asthma for the whole day.

Remember, these tips are just suggestions. You do not need to change your lifestyle to an extreme degree to control your asthma. The most important thing is to follow your Asthma & Allergy Center doctor's instructions on treatments and avoidance so you can live a full and normal life despite your asthma.

