

Triggers

What are asthma triggers?

Asthma triggers are things in the environment, like pollens, smoke, and dust mites, that can trigger asthma attacks. When you are exposed to asthma triggers, your airways may become swollen, tighten up, and make a lot of mucus. Asthma triggers may make your asthma symptoms worse, or keep you from getting better. Everyone has different triggers for their asthma. It is important to find out what YOUR asthma triggers are, and to learn ways to avoid them. Avoiding your asthma triggers will help to control your asthma symptoms, and may lessen the need for your asthma medications. NOTE: Not all of the following asthma triggers will apply to you.

Common asthma triggers and ways to control them.

1. Outdoor pollens, molds, and air pollution

- Stay indoors during the morning when the pollen count is the highest.
- Stay indoors when it is hot, humid, and / or windy outside.
- Use air conditioning, if possible, and do not sleep with the windows open.
- Keep windows in your home AND car closed during seasons when pollen counts are highest (for example: spring and fall).
- Change your furnace filter regularly.
- Consider buying a filter for your furnace.
- Avoid sources of molds (wet leaves, garden debris) or wear a mask if you must work in the yard.
- Shower and wash your hair nightly before going to bed and / or after exercising outdoors.

2. House dust mites (tiny, microscopic spiders found in house dust)

- Use airtight covers on your mattress and box spring (avoid cloth mattress covers).
- Put your pillow in an airtight cover or wash it weekly.
- Avoid feather pillows and comforters—use synthetic pillows.
- Wash all bedding, clothes, and stuffed toys once a week in HOT (>130°F) water.
- Avoid sleeping or lying on upholstered furniture.
- Avoid vacuuming or being in a room while it is being vacuumed or wear a dust mask while vacuuming or dusting and during other general household cleaning.

3. Animal dander (tiny flakes or particles of skin that fall off all warm-blooded animals including CATS, dogs, birds, and rodents)

- Remove the animal from the house.
- If the pet stays in the home, KEEP IT OUT OF THE BEDROOM at all times.
- If there is forced-air heating in the home with a pet, close the air ducts in your bedroom or place a filter over the heating duct.
- Wash pet weekly with plain water.
- Take asthma medications (inhalers) before visiting homes or sites where animals are present.
- Use a vacuum cleaner fitted with a HEPA filter (high-efficiency particulate air) filter.
- The length of the pet's hair DOES NOT matter. The allergen or trigger is in the dander, saliva, and urine of the animal. There is no such thing as a NON-ALLERGENIC pet.

4. Indoor molds

- ❑ Keep bathrooms, kitchens, and basements well-ventilated and clean weekly.
- ❑ Molds can form on houseplants—check them often and / or keep them outdoors.
- ❑ DO NOT use humidifiers. The basement, in particular, may require a dehumidifier.

5. Smoke

- ❑ DO NOT smoke. If you are currently smoking, your doctor or pharmacist can help you quit.
- ❑ Encourage family members to quit smoking.
- ❑ DO NOT allow smoking in your home, particularly in your bedroom.
- ❑ Use an indoor air-cleaning device (for smoke, mold, and animal dander).
- ❑ Avoid wood stoves, fireplaces, and kerosene heaters.

6. Strong odors, fumes, and sprays

- ❑ DO NOT stay in your home when it is being painted.
- ❑ Avoid perfume and perfumed cosmetics like talcum powder and hair spray.
- ❑ DO NOT use room deodorizers.
- ❑ Reduce strong cooking odors (especially frying) by using a fan and opening the windows.
- ❑ Use non-perfumed household cleaning products whenever possible and use only in well-ventilated areas.

7. Infections

- ❑ Avoid persons with colds, the flu, or other respiratory infections.
- ❑ Talk to your doctor about getting your annual flu shot.
- ❑ You may need increased doses of your asthma medications while you are sick.
- ❑ DO NOT take over-the-counter cold remedies, like antihistamines and cough syrup, unless you are advised to do so by your doctor or pharmacist.

8. Exercise

- ❑ Make a medicine plan that allows you to exercise without symptoms.
- ❑ Warm up before doing exercise and cool down afterward.
- ❑ Take an inhaled bronchodilator (albuterol) medication fifteen minutes before exercising, or as instructed by your doctor or pharmacist.

9. Cold air

- ❑ Wear a scarf over your mouth and nose in cold weather.
- ❑ Dress warmly in the winter or on windy days.

REMEMBER: By recognizing and avoiding your asthma triggers, you can help keep asthma attacks from starting. This is a very important part of controlling your asthma.

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