



Center for
Urban Responses
to Environmental
Stressors



Asthma & Allergies

FACT
SHEET

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How To Breathe Easier



Pollen is worse during spring and fall. Keep your windows shut, play inside, and shower before going to bed to help.



Keep dogs and cats out of bedrooms and wash your hands and face after touching animals.



Breathe through your nose to warm the air going into your lungs when you're exercising or playing. If it's cold, cover your nose and mouth with a scarf. Talk to a doctor about medicine to help with symptoms.



Smokers should always smoke outside. Smoke from any source can make allergies and asthma worse including from cigarettes, pipes, fireplaces, incense, and wood burning stoves.



Community Questions

Answers to our most frequently asked questions about asthma and allergies

- Q.** Is using bleach as a cleaner a concern because it kills bacteria?
- A.** Bleach is an asthmagen, which means it can cause asthma, not just trigger an asthma attack in someone who already has the disease. Avoid products with strong fumes. Soap and water is all you need to wash hands and dishes.
- Q.** How can I prevent mold?
- A.** Mold is bad for allergies and asthma. Here are a few ways to keep mold from developing into a problem:
- Use an exhaust fan or open a window in the bathroom when showering.
 - If you notice a leak in your house, fix it quickly.
 - Remove carpet from your bathroom or other areas that are damp often.
 - Clean your sinks and bathtub or shower monthly.
 - Take any steps to be sure moisture doesn't collect in your home.



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Tips BREATHE EASIER IN THE "D"



Don't hang laundry out to dry. Pollen will stick to fabric while drying.

Wash your clothes in hot water to remove pet dander or pollen from being outdoors.



Community Partner & Resource

Special thanks to the Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America - Michigan Chapter for the great information on asthma and allergies (see back).



New Research

Nicholas Lukacs, PhD, from the University of Michigan conducts research on the ingestion of dog dust in rat's stomachs. When rats were exposed to dog dust and exposed to an allergen, their asthmatic responses were lessened. Maybe children's yearning for a puppy is to protect their health. We'll wait for science to confirm before advising!



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What Causes or Triggers Asthma?

People with asthma have inflamed airways which are sensitive to things which may not bother other people. These things are “triggers.” Asthma triggers vary from person to person. Some people react to only a few while others react to many. If you have asthma, it is important to keep track of the causes or triggers that you know provoke your asthma. Because the symptoms do not always occur right after exposure, this may take a bit of detective work. Delayed asthma episodes may occur depending on the type of trigger and how sensitive a person is to it.

IRRITANTS IN THE AIR

Irritants in the environment can also bring on an asthma episode. Although people are not allergic to these items, they can bother inflamed, sensitive airways:

- Smoke from cigarettes
- Air pollution such as smog, ozone, and others
- Wood fires & charcoal grills
- Strong fumes/odors (ie. paint, gasoline, perfume and scented soaps)
- Dusts and particles in the air
- Chemicals

RESPIRATORY ILLNESS

Respiratory infections are a common asthma trigger in children. Colds | Flu (influenza) | Sore throats | Sinus Infections | Pneumonia

EXERCISE

Exercise and other activities that make you breathe harder can affect your asthma. Exercise — especially in cold air — is a frequent asthma trigger. Exercise-induced bronchoconstriction (EIB) is a form of asthma that is triggered by physical activity. It is also known as exercise-induced asthma (EIA). Symptoms may not appear until after several minutes of sustained exercise. (If symptoms appear sooner than this, it usually means you need to adjust your treatment.) With proper treatment, you do not need to limit your physical activity.

WEATHER

Dry wind, cold air or sudden changes in weather can sometimes bring on an asthma episode.

FEELING AND EXPRESSING STRONG EMOTIONS

Anger | Fear | Excitement | Laughter | Yelling | Crying
When you feel strong emotions, your breathing changes – even if you don’t have asthma. It may cause wheezing or other asthma symptoms in someone with asthma.

MEDICINES

Some medicines can also trigger asthma:

- Sensitivity to aspirin and NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs)
- Medicines known as beta blockers – can also make controlling asthma difficult

Talk to your healthcare provider about your asthma and your triggers. Be sure to discuss any changes in your asthma management.



COMMON TYPES OF ALLERGIES

An allergy occurs when your body’s immune system sees a certain substance as harmful. It reacts by causing an allergic reaction. There are many types of allergies. Some allergies are seasonal and others are year-round. Some allergies may be life-long. It is important to work with your health care provider to create a plan to manage your allergy. Avoiding your allergens is the best way to prevent an allergic reaction.

Pollen Allergy

Pollen is one of the most common triggers of seasonal allergies. Many people know pollen allergy as “hay fever,” but experts usually refer to it as “seasonal allergic rhinitis.”

Pet Allergy

Allergies to pets with fur are common. It is important to know that an allergy-free (hypoallergenic) breed of dog or cat does not exist.

Mold Allergy

Mold and mildew are fungi. Since fungi grow in so many places, both indoors and outdoors, allergic reactions can occur year round.

Insect Allergy

Bees, wasps, hornets, yellow jackets and fire ants are the most common stinging insects that cause an allergic reaction. Non-stinging insects can also cause allergic reactions. The most common are cockroaches and the insect-like dust mite. Allergies to these two insects may be the most common cause of year-round allergy and asthma.

Latex Allergy

A latex allergy is an allergic reaction to natural rubber latex. Natural rubber latex gloves, balloons, condoms and other natural rubber products contain latex. An allergy to latex can be a serious health risk.

Information courtesy the Allergy & Asthma Foundation of America