



# Asthma Triggers



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## What are triggers?

Triggers are things that may bother the airways, making it hard to breathe or cause asthma signs or symptoms. Avoid your triggers whenever possible. Triggers can be different from person to person. Allergy testing can help you know what some of your triggers are.

If you are going to come into contact with a trigger you can take your albuterol inhaler 15-20 minutes before coming into contact with it to prevent an attack.

Triggers may include:

- Cigarette smoke
- Pollution
- Strong odors
- Cold, flu or sinus infections
- Behavior: Exercise, laughing, crying
- Changes in weather, hot or cold weather
- Allergies to:
  - Pets
  - Mold
  - Dust
  - Cockroaches
  - Rodents
  - Certain foods, medicines



# Dust Mites and Dust Control



## Why does it cause asthma attacks?

- Dust mites and their droppings build up on sheets, blankets, mattress, pillows, stuffed toys, furniture and rugs
- They are part of the house dust and are a normal part of life - every house has them
- Their droppings can contribute to your asthma

## What can I do?

- Wash bedding at least every 2 weeks in hot water
- Get rid of carpets and large rugs
- Use special allergen proof covers for pillow, mattress and box springs
- Remove shoes at the door
- Wash and dry stuffed animals or place in freezer overnight every week
- Vacuum weekly

# Rodents and Roaches

## Why does it cause asthma attacks?



- Roach and mouse saliva, eggs, droppings, secretions, skin and their bodies can trigger asthma
- Roaches and mice like wet and warm places and live in groups
- Roaches and mice are attracted to water, food, shelter and warmth

## What can I do?

- Use baits and traps
- Clean up food spills, and crumbs quickly
- Avoid eating in different rooms
- Take out trash every night
- Vacuum regularly
- Store food in sealed containers
- Clean up dishes after use, or put in dishwasher after rinsing
- Put lid on trash can
- Contact landlord to repair large gaps, holes in walls, leaky pipes, faucets, etc.

# Pets and Asthma

## Why does it cause asthma attacks?

- Animal dander is dead skin cells from animals
- People with asthma are allergic to dander, saliva or urine from furry or feathered pets
- Dander sticks to clothes and hands



## What can I do?

- Get rid of the furry or feathered pet if you can
- Choose pets without fur or feathers
- Do not allow furry or feathered pets in the bedroom
- Wash hands and change clothes after touching a pet or being in a house with a pet
- Bathe the pet every week
- Vacuum and clean pet sleeping and play areas often

# Environmental Tobacco Smoke

## Why does it cause asthma attacks?

- Smoke that smokers breathe out is called “secondhand smoke”
- If you breathe secondhand smoke, it can cause health problems, such as asthma
- The smoke irritates your lungs, and can increase your risk for asthma



## What can I do?

- Do not smoke in your home or car
- Do not smoke in the presence of your children
- Use a “smoking jacket” to smoke outside; remove the jacket before coming into the house
- Do not let anyone else smoke in the presence of your children
- Stop smoking

# Moisture and Ventilation

## Why does it cause asthma attacks?

- Too much moisture in your home can increase dust mites, mold and roaches
- This will increase your risk for asthma
- Moisture can come from plumbing leaks, poor air circulation, flooding, sewer backups, etc.
- The key to preventing mold is to reduce moisture!



## What can I do to prevent mold growth?

- Scour sinks and tubs every 2 weeks
- Clean garbage cans frequently
- Use exhaust fans or windows in the kitchen and bathroom (if no fan, keep door open after showering)
- Clean up and fix leaks within 24 hours, call landlord if needed
- Circulate fresh air in your home, let stale air out
- Move furniture a few inches from the wall to let air circulate
- Dry condensation on surfaces

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## What can I do to clean up mold?

- Wash mold off hard surfaces with laundry detergent or dishwashing soap, water and a scrub brush
- Clean mold problem areas (where mold keeps growing because the area keeps getting wet) with a mixture of ¼ c. of bleach with 1 gallon of water
- Vacuum and clean home weekly to remove mold spores
- Throw away bedding, fabrics, ceiling tiles, boxes, drywall, etc. that have been wet for more than 2 days

# Exercise

## Why does it cause asthma attacks?

- Exercise can trigger asthma attacks
- Exercise is a very common asthma trigger, especially for children
- Exercise builds healthy lungs and strong bodies.
- Everyone with asthma should exercise!



## What can I do?

- Take albuterol 15-20 min before exercising
- Warm-up and cool-down
- Stop** if coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath or chest tightness occur
- Exercise indoors on high pollution, high pollen, very hot or cold/dry days
- Do less intensive exercise if you have recently had an asthma attack or are having mild symptoms
- Tell your coach/PE teacher about your child's asthma

# Infections

## Why do they cause asthma attacks?

- Any upper respiratory infections - like a cold, the flu, or sinusitis - can affect your lungs causing inflammation and airway narrowing



## What can I do?

- Be aware of any asthma symptoms, even mild, so that you can contact your doctor and avoid a more serious asthma attack
- Wash hands frequently
- Get a flu shot every year to prevent infections that can trigger asthma
- Keep breathing equipment clean
- Clean surfaces, door handles, etc. regularly to reduce the spread of germs

# Pollen

## Why does it cause asthma attacks?

- Pollen is the powder made by flowers, trees, grasses and weeds
- Pollen can trigger asthma symptoms in some people



## What can I do?

- Track daily pollen counts on the news or radio
- Stay indoors during peak pollen times (5am – 10am and dry, windy days)
- Close windows and use air conditioning in home and car on hot days if possible
- Avoid fresh cut grass
- Don't hang clothes out to dry
- Bathe each evening to wash pollen from your skin and hair
- Change clothes before getting into bed

# Air Pollution

## Why does it cause asthma attacks?

- Air pollution can make it harder to breathe and can cause coughing, wheezing, chest discomfort, and a burning feeling in the lungs
- Symptoms can begin up to a day **after** you have been in polluted air and can make you more sensitive to other triggers like mold or dust mites



## What can I do?

- Track air pollution levels on the news or radio
- Stay indoors, close windows and use air conditioning in home and car on Code Red or Code Orange air quality days
- Stay indoors and exercise indoors during peak pollution times (often afternoons and evenings on hot summer days)
- Exercise away from busy roads or industrial areas

# Household Products/Air Fresheners

## Why do they cause asthma attacks?

- Airborne chemicals and aromas can trigger asthma attacks
- This include: paint, cooking fumes (especially when frying), cleaning supplies, smelly soaps and lotions, perfumes, hairspray, bleach, air fresheners, incense, scented candles, bug spray, etc.



## What can I do?

- Avoid using chemical cleaners and instead use vinegar, baking soda, Borax, and hot water to clean; use olive oil to polish furniture
- Do not use perfumes, air fresheners, incense, bug spray or scented candles
- If using bleach or other chemicals, be sure to open windows to ventilate and use the chemicals when the person with asthma is not at home
- Use kitchen fan and/or window when cooking. Cook only when asthmatic child is not in the kitchen

# Behavior and Stress

## Why do they cause asthma attacks?

- Crying, laughing and stressful situations can trigger asthma attacks and need to be managed just like other triggers
- Stress increases inflammation in the body and lungs
- Parents' stress has been found to affect their asthma management efforts and their children's asthma symptoms



## What can I do?

- Replace anxious thoughts with positive thoughts
- Figure out what your stressors are and try to resolve them

### You and your child should:

- Exercise and eat a diet low in fat and sugar and rich in vegetables and fruits of a variety of colors
- Get enough sleep
- Recognize *early* asthma signs, avoid extreme reactions, and stay calm to help prevent a serious asthma attack

# Food Allergies

## Why does it cause asthma attacks?



- Foods can trigger asthma attacks in allergic individuals
- Common food allergies: sulfites (in dried fruit, wine), milk, eggs, nuts, fish, soy and wheat

## What can I do?

- Get allergy tested to help identify food allergies
- Avoid foods that cause any negative physical reactions (be sure to read labels for “hidden” ingredients!)
- Get an Epi-Pen from your health care provider to use in case of an allergic reaction that makes it difficult to breathe



# Diet

## Why does it cause asthma attacks?

- Diets low in vitamins and high in fat have been associated with increased asthma symptoms and decreased response to asthma medications
- Obesity is a risk factor for asthma

## What can I do?

- Eat a variety of different colors of fruits and vegetables every day
- Eat calcium-rich foods (or foods fortified with calcium) several times a day such as milk, yogurt and cheese
- Eat fish and low fat chicken, turkey and meat
- Limit fried foods and sugar

