

- Allergy

Avoiding Asthma Triggers

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Asthma is a condition that can make it hard to breathe. Asthma attacks happen when the airways in the lungs become narrow and inflamed. The symptoms can be mild or severe and they can come and go. Sometimes asthma symptoms start all of a sudden. Asthma symptoms can include:

- Wheezing or noisy breathing
- Coughing
- A tight feeling in the chest
- Shortness of breath

Although it is rare, an episode of asthma can some times even lead to death.

What are asthma triggers?

An asthma trigger is anything that causes asthma symptoms or makes them worse. It's important to know what your triggers are. That way, you can avoid them so that your symptoms don't worsen.

One of the best ways to identify asthma triggers is to pay careful attention to the pattern of asthma symptoms. For example, if symptoms occur mainly at home, something at home may be involved. If symptoms are when outside, an outdoor allergy, such as vehicle smoke or pollen, is more likely to blame. Common asthma triggers are:

- Cigarette smoke
- Certain medicines, such as aspirin, beta blockers
- Respiratory infections
- Cleaning products, such as bleach
- Perfumes or scents
- Air pollution
- Biofuel
- Exercise
- Hormones (Menstruation, pregnancy)
- Cold and dry air
- Emotional factors (anxiety, stress)

Some people can have things in the environment that they are allergic to. These are called “allergic triggers.” Examples are:

- Dust mites – These are tiny bugs that are too small for you to see. They live in beds, couches, pillows, and other places in your home.
- Mould
- Dogs and cats – People can be allergic to animal saliva, urine, or dander (flakes of dead skin).
- Pollen
- Cockroach droppings
- Mice

How do I know what my asthma triggers are?

You might already know what makes your asthma symptoms worse. But if you don't, talk with your doctor. Your doctor might do allergy tests to see if you have allergic triggers. Allergy tests include blood tests or skin tests. During a skin test, a doctor puts a drop of a substance that you might be allergic to on your skin, and makes a tiny needle prick in the skin. Then, they watch your skin to see if it turns red and bumpy.

What should I do when I find out what my triggers are?

Once asthma triggers have been identified, you have several options:

- ☒ Avoid the trigger entirely
- ☒ Limit exposure to the trigger if it cannot be completely avoided
- ☒ If exposure to the trigger can be predicted, consult with a doctor about taking an extra dose of medicine before exposure to the trigger
- ☒ Immunotherapy (allergy shots)

The best thing to do is to stay away from your triggers. For example, if cigarette smoke makes your asthma symptoms worse, avoid people who are smoking. If you smoke, get help to quit. Here are some other things that you can do:

- ☒ To avoid getting sick with an infection, wash your hands often. You can also get a flu shot.
- ☒ Clean mattresses carpets and pillows to avoid dust mites
- ☒ To avoid air pollution, stay indoors when air pollution levels are high, and don't exercise near a busy road.
- ☒ Avoid using bleach and other strong cleaners.
- ☒ If you have allergic triggers, try to avoid the things you are allergic to. If you can't avoid your triggers, talk with your doctor about what you can do. Exercise is an example of a trigger that you should not avoid, because exercise keeps you healthy. To prevent asthma symptoms when you exercise:
 - ☒ Ask your doctor if you can take an extra dose of your quick-relief inhaler medicine before you exercise
 - ☒ Warm up slowly before each exercise session
 - ☒ Avoid exercising outdoors if it is very cold out

Most people with asthma are able to live normal lives. You can help manage your asthma by: Making changes in your life to avoid your triggers, keeping track of your asthma and telling your doctor when your symptoms change.