



What Are The Most Common Asthma Triggers or Allergens?

Many things can start, or trigger, an asthma flare-up (exacerbation). Some triggers are allergens, substances that occur in nature. Other triggers are substances, usually chemical in nature, called irritants. Some patients are allergic or sensitive to all of these allergens while others are only sensitive or allergic to one or a few. At this time, researchers don't feel any of these allergens CAUSE asthma, but they can and do initiate or trigger an asthma reaction. These reactions are called exacerbations or flares or a flare-up, meaning asthma symptoms appear. A major step in controlling asthma symptoms is to identify individual triggers and then eliminate them in the patient's environment.

Natural Allergens:

Dust and Dust Mites

- Keep mattresses and pillows in dust proof covers (bedding encasements)
- Wash all bedding each week in hot (130-140°) water
- Remove stuffed toys from bedroom or wash toys weekly in hot water. Store them in sealed plastic bags
- Remove rugs or carpeting from bedroom and avoid using drapes, curtains, throw pillows
- Change furnace filters monthly, preferably using hepa quality filters
- Wear masks when doing cleaning
- Vacuum at least once a week using a Hepa filter machine; vacuum upholstery too
- Don't use feather-type dusters but instead use dampened cloths which will hold the dust, then wash well

Pet dander

- Dander isn't related to length of fur or hair on an animal; it is dried saliva animals
- Don't keep warm-blooded pets (animals with fur or feathers) in your bedroom and home – all dogs and cats have dander
- Large farm animals also cause allergic reactions – horse saliva is an allergen
- Hamsters, gerbils, mice, guinea pig feces and urine are allergens

Mold

- Fix leaky faucets and pipes, clean any humidifiers regularly as directed, clean fish tanks regularly
- If there is mold, find the water source and repair it, then clean moldy surfaces with a 1 part bleach and 9 parts water solution but keep work area well-ventilated while cleaning
- Change shower curtains often – if black spotted, discard
- Nature walks – molds abound outdoors in wooded areas, under piles of leaves and vegetation so avoid these areas on damp and windy days
- Install and use bathroom exhaust fans to help control moisture

Cockroaches

- Don't keep food in the bedroom, store all opened foods in sealed containers
- Close garbage cans
- Plug holes around water pipes where roaches can enter the house; take care bringing bags, boxes into the house from grocery stores or storage areas
- Keep sink drains closed when not in use to deter roach entry
- After killing roaches, thoroughly clean area – it is roach feces and urine that is the allergen

Pollen

- Stay indoors when pollen counts are high
- Wear face masks when doing yard work or avoid that chore
- Not all pollens are equal: airborne pollens are usually the allergen, not pollens carried by bees or butterflies
- Pollens are produced by trees, shrubs, flowers, grass, weeds – avoid your allergic pollens
- Keep windows closed and use AC on windy days or high pollen count days
- Pollen counts are heavy right before a rain storm so avoid outdoor activity at that time
- Plant female flowers, trees and grasses that don't produce airborne pollens

Irritant Allergens

Smoke

- Don't allow smoking in the home or cars
- Don't use wood-burning stoves, fireplaces or kerosene heaters
- Avoid being around bon fires, campfires or barbecue grills if you have asthma

Strong Odors

- Avoid using perfumes, talcum powder, hair spray, paints, solvents, fertilizers and scented household products
- Store pesticides and insecticides in ventilated areas away from the house
- Install and use kitchen exhaust fans to take cooking odors and smoke out of the house

Ozone

- Polluted air can be deadly for anyone with asthma or other respiratory problems; pollution tends to be worse on hot, still days of summer
- Check ozone levels daily in summer and follow the color guideline warning system; stay indoors on orange, red and purple alert days

Additional Triggers

Exercise

- Some exercises and sports are better than others. Those requiring short burst of energy are better
- Ask your doctor if you should use medication before exercise as a preventative since strenuous activity might induce symptoms for many asthmatics (strenuous varies from individual to individual)

Colds

- Avoid people with colds
- Prevent colds by eating a healthy diet and building a strong immune system, and washing hands frequently
- Colds are caused by viruses and can not be cured with antibiotics. Treat colds with plenty of rest and lots of fluids

Weather

- On cold days, cover your nose and mouth with a scarf
- Avoid outdoor exercise on very cold days
- Pollen counts are highest right before a thunderstorm so avoid prolonged outdoor activity at that time

Stress

- Stay calm, focused, breathe slowly, think pleasant thoughts, practice breathing relaxation techniques

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