

Know your Asthma Triggers



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Asthma is a chronic inflammatory disease that affects the lungs, causing airways to narrow and swell which makes breathing difficult. Asthma affects people of all ages, races, incomes, and ethnicities. Common asthma symptoms include coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, and chest tightness. Exposure to asthma triggers can lead to symptoms, which may lead to asthma exacerbations, also known as asthma attacks.

Identifying and avoiding your personal asthma triggers is essential for maintaining control of your asthma. Work with your healthcare provider to better understand your triggers.

Know the Difference Between Allergens and Irritants

Asthma triggers can be categorized into two different groups: allergens and irritants.

Allergens are asthma triggers that affect individuals with specific sensitivities or allergies to certain substances, causing an allergic reaction. Allergens can include things like dust mites, cockroaches and pests, molds and pet dander.

Irritants are asthma triggers that affect individuals with asthma without a specific allergy. Irritants can include secondhand smoke, air pollution, wood smoke, strong fumes, and chemicals. By identifying your personal asthma triggers, you are able to gain better asthma control.

Reduce Your Exposure to Common Allergens

Dust Mites

- Use allergen-proof bedding covers on pillows and mattresses. Regularly wash your bedding once a week in hot water and dry completely.
- Dust surfaces using a microfiber or wet cloth. Vacuum carpets and upholstered furniture using a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter vacuum, cleaning the filter regularly.
- For children, choose stuffed animals that can be washed in hot water and dry completely.

Molds

- If mold is a problem inside the home, clean it up and eliminate the sources.
- Maintain indoor humidity levels between 30-50%.
- Dry damp or wet areas within 24-48 hours to prevent mold growth.
- Use exhaust fans or open a window while showering, cooking, or washing dishes.

Cockroaches and Pests

- Keep surfaces and floors free from clutter. Dispose of trash in a can with a lid.
- Ensure dishes, crumbs, and spills are cleaned right away. Vacuum and mop floors regularly.
- Store food in airtight containers in cabinets and on countertops.
- Seal cracks in the walls and floors where cockroaches and pests can enter. Fix leaky pipes under sinks and in the basement.

Pet Dander

- Remove pets from the home if possible. If that isn't an option keep all pets out of the bedrooms and off furniture.
- Vacuum carpets and furniture using a vacuum with a HEPA filter. Additionally dust surfaces with a damp cloth.
- Regularly wash and brush the pet outside to remove the pet's dander.

Reduce Your Exposure to Common Irritants

Secondhand Smoke

- It is best to quit smoking. Free cessation resources are available to help you like [Quit Now Indiana](#) or 1-800-QUITNOW.
- Do not allow smoking or vaping inside of your home or car.
- Talk with your children and teens about the dangers of smoking and vaping.
- Choose to visit smoke-free and vape-free homes and businesses.

Strong Odors and Chemicals

- When possible, choose odor and fragrance free cleaning products. The [EPA Safer Choice](#) has more info on products that are safer for human health.
- When cleaning, use an exhaust fan or open windows for ventilation.
- Always follow the directions provided on product labels.

Air Pollution

- Monitor the daily air quality index with [SmogWatch](#) or [AirNow](#) before participating in outdoor activities.
- Stay indoors when the pollen or pollutant counts are high.
- Regularly replace central air filters every 30-90 days or when they are dirty. If you do not have a central air system, you can also use an air cleaner equipped with a HEPA filter.

Wood Smoke

- Wood burning stoves and chimneys should be inspected every year by a certified professional.
- If possible, replace old wood stoves with an EPA-certified heating appliance.
- When burning wood, to reduce smoke, burn dry wood that is split, stacked, and covered for a minimum of six months.

Additional Asthma Triggers

Allergens and irritants are common asthma triggers, but they are not the only triggers that can make asthma symptoms arise. Other common asthma triggers include: exercise, strong emotions, sudden or extreme weather changes, high humidity, pollen, certain foods and medications, or other respiratory infections. Talk to your healthcare provider to better understand your personal asthma triggers and before beginning exercise.

Take Action

Identifying and knowing your asthma triggers is an important step to take control of your asthma. Speaking with a healthcare provider can lead you to recognizing what triggers your asthma. During your visit, create an [asthma action plan](#) that will walk you through how to treat asthma and know what to do when symptoms arise.



For patients whose healthcare provider feels trigger identification and education would be beneficial, the IDOH Asthma Environmental Home Visit Program is available. Email the program at IDOHasthma@health.in.gov or click or scan the QR code to see if you qualify for a visit.

References

<https://www.epa.gov/asthma/asthma-triggers-gain-control>

<https://aafa.org/asthma/asthma-triggers-causes/>

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For additional information on asthma:

www.asthma.in.gov

