

How to Control Things That Make Your Asthma Worse

You can help prevent asthma attacks by staying away things that make your asthma worse. This guide suggests many ways to help you do this.

You need to find out what makes your asthma worse. Some things that make asthma worse for some people are not a problem for others. You do not need to do all of the things listed in this handout.

Look at the things list below. Put a check mark next to the ones that you know make your asthma worse. Ask your doctor to help you find out what else makes your asthma worse. Then, decide with your doctor what steps you will take. Start with the things in your bedroom that bother your asthma. Try something simple first.

TOBACCO SMOKE

- If you smoke, ask your doctor for ways to help you quit. Ask family members to quite smoking, too.
- Do not allow smoking in your home or around you.
- Be sure no one smokes at a child's day care center.

DUST MITES

Many people with asthma are allergic to dust mites. Dust mites are like tiny "bugs" you cannot see, that live in cloth or carpet.

Things that will help the most:

- Encase your mattress in a special dust-proof cover.*
- Encase your pillow in a special dust-proof cover* or wash the pillow each week in hot water. Water must be hotter than 130° F to kill the mites.
- Wash the sheets and blankets on your bed each week in hot water.

Other things that can help:

- Reduce indoor humidity to less than 50 percent. Dehumidifiers or central air conditioners can do this.
- Try not to sleep or lie on cloth-covered cushions or furniture.
- Remove carpets from your bedroom and those laid on concrete, if you can.
- Keep stuffed toys out of the bed or wash the toys weekly in hot water.

ANIMAL DANDER

Some people are allergic to the flakes of skin or dried saliva from animals with fur or feathers.

The best thing to do:

- Keep furred or feathered pets out of your home.

If you can't keep the pet outdoors, then:

- Keep the pet out of your bedroom and keep the bedroom door closed.
- Cover the air vents in your bedroom with heavy material to filter the air.*
- Remove carpets and furniture covered with cloth from your home. If that is not possible, keep the pet out of the rooms where these are.

COCKROACH

Many people with asthma are allergic to the dried droppings and remains of cockroaches.

- Keep all food out of your bedroom.
- Keep food and garbage in closed containers (never leave food out).
- Use poison baits, powders, gels, or paste (for example, boric acid). You can also use traps.
- If a spray is used to kill roaches, stay out the room until the odor goes away.

VACUUM CLEANING

- Try to get someone else to vacuum for your once or twice a week, if you can. Stay out of rooms while they are being vacuumed and for a short while afterward.

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- If you vacuum, use a dust mask (from a hardware store), a double-layered or microfilter vacuum cleaner bag,* or a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter.*

INDOOR MOLD

- Fix leaky faucets, pipes, or other sources of water.
- Clean moldy surfaces with a cleaner that has bleach in it.

POLLEN and OUTDOOR MOLD

What to do during your allergy season (when pollen or mold spore counts are high):

- Try to keep your windows closed.
- Stay indoors with windows closed during the midday and afternoon, if you can. Pollen and some mold spore counts are highest at that time.
- Ask your doctor whether you need to take or increase anti-inflammatory medicine before your allergy season starts.

SMOKE, STRONG ODORS, and SPRAYS

- If possible, do not use a wood-burning stove, kerosene heater, or fireplace.
- Try to stay away from strong odors and sprays, such as perfume, talcum powder, hair spray, and paints.

EXERCISE, SPORTS, WORK and PLAY

- You should be able to be active without symptoms. See your doctor if you have asthma symptoms when you are active - like when you exercise, do sports, play, or work hard.
- Ask your doctor about taking this medicine before you exercise to prevent symptoms.
- Warm up for six to ten minutes before you exercise.
- Try not to work or play hard outside when the air pollution or pollen levels (if you are allergic to the pollen) are high.

OTHER THINGS THAT CAN MAKE ASTHMA WORSE

- Flu: Get a flu shot.
- Sulfites in foods: Do not drink beer or wine or eat shrimp, dried fruit, or processed potatoes if they cause asthma symptoms.
- Cold air: Cover your nose and mouth with a scarf on cold or windy days.
- Other medicines: Tell your doctor about all the medicines you may take. Include cold medicines, aspirin, and even eye drops.

*To find out where to get products mentioned in this guide, call:

Allergy and Asthma Network/Mothers of Asthmatics, Inc. at 800-878-4403
American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology at 800-822-2762
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America at 800-727-8462
National Jewish Medical and Research Center (Lung Line) at 800-222-5864

Reference:

From Facts About Controlling Asthma, National Asthma Education and Prevention Program, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, NIH Publication No. 97-2339. A reproductive handout.

If you have questions or concerns, or need to make an appointment,
please call: **Dial-A-Nurse at 333-2700.**

If you are concerned about any difference in your treatment plan and the information
in this handout, you are advised to contact your health care provider.

Visit the McKinley Health Center Web Site at: <http://www.mckinley.uiuc.edu>