

How to Make Sure You and Your Family Can Breathe-- Even with Asthma

Do you or any of your family members have asthma?

Do you ever wonder why? Do you wonder if there's anything you can do about it? Anything that might limit the need for medication?

Here's where you can learn more!

Do you suffer from asthma?

That tight feeling in your chest? The shortness of breath? The shallow cough because your lungs almost feel congested, but dry and tight at the same time?

Yes, you may be one of the millions as people suffering from asthma--20 million sufferers estimated in the United States alone. Because of asthma, every day in America:

- 40,000 people miss school or work
- 30,000 people have an asthma attack
- 5,000 people visit the emergency room
- 1,000 people are admitted to the hospital
- 11 people die due to asthma

But, What is Asthma? What Causes Asthma?

Asthma is the chronic inflammation of the bronchial tubes in the lungs which restricts the amount of air traveling through the tubes, causing shortness of breath. Cells in the lungs may also produce extra mucus which tightens the airways further, causing anything from minor wheezing to severe difficulty in breathing. Bronchial tubes that are chronically inflamed may become overly sensitive, "twitchy," and remain in a state of heightened sensitivity. This is called "Bronchial Hyperreactivity" (BHR).

Inflammation, or swelling, is a normal bodily response to injury or infection. The blood flow increases to the affected site and cells rush in and ward off the offending problem. The central issue in asthma, however, is that the inflammation does not completely resolve itself, which leads to recurrent asthma attacks. In the long term, it may lead to permanent thickening of the bronchial walls, called airway "remodeling," which lessens the bronchial tubes' response to medications.

Asthma is a chronic but treatable condition which can be managed much like someone manages diabetes or heart disease. You and your doctor can work together to control asthma, reduce the severity and frequency of attacks and help maintain a normal, active life.

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Causes

- A number of factors may contribute to your developing asthma, such as:
- Environmental pollutants like those found in urban areas
- Secondhand smoke
- Work-related irritants such as chemicals used in farming, hairdressing, or in manufacturing
- One or both parents with asthma
- Respiratory infections in childhood
- Low birth weight
- Obesity
- Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)

What are the Symptoms of Asthma?

And, More Importantly, What are the Triggers That Cause an Asthma Attack?

Symptoms

Asthma symptoms can range from mild (occasional episodes with mild symptoms like wheezing) to severe and life-threatening. Symptoms vary from person to person but may include:

- Wheezing or shortness of breath
- Interrupted sleep
- Tightness or pain in the chest
- Coughing
- Noisy or faster breathing

An acute asthma attack is potentially life-threatening, and they do not stop on their own without treatment. Some of the symptoms of severe asthma are persistent coughing, and the inability to speak full sentences or walk without shortness of breath. Your chest may feel closed and your lips may have a bluish tint. In addition, you may feel agitation, confusion, or an inability to concentrate. You may hunch your shoulders, sit or stand up to breathe more easily, and strain your abdominal and neck muscles. These are signs of an impending respiratory system failure. At this point, it is unlikely that inhaled medications will reverse this process.

Triggers

- A number of irritants can trigger an attack, such as:
- Allergens, such as pollen, animal dander, or mold
- Cockroaches and dust mites
- Air pollutants and irritants
- Smoke
- Strong odors or scented products or chemicals
- Respiratory infections, including the common cold
- Physical exertion, including exercise
- Strong emotions and stress
- Cold air
- Some medications, such as beta blockers, aspirin, and other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs

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What Can I Do About it?

Although many people with asthma rely on medications to relieve symptoms and control inflammation, you can do several things on your own to maintain overall health and lessen the possibility of attacks:

- **Keep indoor air clean.** Change the filters in your furnace and air conditioner according to the manufacturer's instructions. Also consider installing a small-particle filter in your ventilation system. If you use a humidifier, change the water daily. Get an air purifier, such as the Ecoquest Fresh Air unit, to kill germs and mold in the air.
- **Exercise.** Regular exercise can strengthen your heart and lungs so that they don't have to work so hard. Aim for 30 minutes of exercise on most days, but work up to that if you need to. Keep in mind that exercising in cold temperatures may trigger symptoms. If you do exercise in cold temperatures, wear a face mask to warm the air you breathe, and don't exercise in temperatures below zero. Activities such as golf, walking and swimming are less likely to trigger attacks, but be sure to discuss any exercise program with your doctor.
- **Use your air conditioner.** Air conditioning helps reduce the amount of airborne allergens indoors, as well as lowering indoor humidity. If you don't have air conditioning, try to keep your windows closed during pollen season.
- **Decontaminate your decor.** Minimize dust that may aggravate nighttime symptoms. Try using dust-proof covers on your pillows, mattresses and box springs. Put washable curtains or blinds at your windows, and replace carpeting with hardwood or linoleum flooring, which are easier to keep clean.
- **Maintain optimal humidity.** Keep humidity low in your home and office. If you live in a damp climate, consider using a dehumidifier.
- **Reduce pet dander.** If you're allergic to dander, avoid pets with fur or feathers. If you must have them (I know I do!), make sure they are regularly bathed or groomed to reduce the amount of dander in your surroundings.
- **Clean regularly.** Clean your home at least once a week. Because cleaning stirs up dust, however, wear a mask, or have someone else clean, if you can. Avoid harsh cleansers, though, as the chemical fumes can trigger an asthma attack. Try using an environmentally gentle cleanser like EcoH.
- **Limit use of contact lenses.** Try wearing eyeglasses instead of contact lenses when the pollen count is high to keep pollen grains from getting trapped under the lenses.
- **Control heartburn and gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD).** The acid reflux that causes heartburn may damage lung airways and worsen asthma symptoms. If you have frequent or constant heartburn, talk to your doctor about treatment options.
- **Do not smoke** or allow smoking in your home.
- To **control dust mites**, wash your sheets, blankets, pillows, and stuffed toys once a week in hot water. You can get special dust proof covers for your mattress and pillows.
- **Avoid cold air**, wear a scarf over your mouth and nose in the winter.
- **Eat right.** It's almost a cliché, but the more fruits and vegetables you can eat, and the more you avoid over-processed, fatty foods, the better your overall health will be. For asthma sufferers, anything that is a natural anti-inflammatory can only help, by reducing the swelling in the bronchial tubes. One of the best anti-inflammatories around? Heartland Select, based on the miracle Muscadine Grape.

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