



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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Asthma

Important Asthma Triggers

If you have asthma your airways always have some irritation. When you have an asthma attack this irritation gets worse and your airways close part way and get blocked with mucus. Asthma attacks may include coughing, chest tightness, wheezing, and trouble breathing.

An asthma attack can occur when you are exposed to things in the environment, such as house dust mites and tobacco smoke. These are called *asthma triggers*.

Your personal triggers can be very different from those of another person with asthma. Try to avoid your triggers. Some of the most important triggers are listed below:



Environmental Tobacco Smoke (Secondhand Smoke)

Environmental tobacco smoke is often called *secondhand smoke* because the smoke created by a smoker is breathed in by a second person nearby. Parents, friends, and relatives of children with asthma should try to stop smoking and should never smoke around a person with asthma. They should only smoke outdoors and not in the family home or car. They should not allow others to smoke in the home, and they should make sure their child's school is smoke-free.

Dust Mites

Dust mites are in almost everybody's homes, but they don't cause everybody to have asthma attacks. If you have asthma, dust mites may be a trigger for an attack. To help prevent asthma attacks, use mattress covers and pillowcase covers to make a barrier between dust mites and yourself. Don't use down-filled pillows, quilts, or comforters. Remove stuffed animals and clutter from your bedroom.

Outdoor Air Pollution

Pollution caused by industrial emissions and automobile exhaust can cause an asthma attack. Pay attention to air quality forecasts on radio, television, and Internet and plan your activities for when air pollution levels will be low if air pollution aggravates your asthma. A good source of air quality information is [EnviroFlash \(http://www.enviroflash.info/\)](http://www.enviroflash.info/).

Cockroach Allergen

Cockroaches and their droppings may trigger an asthma attack. Get rid of cockroaches in your home and keep them from coming back by taking away their food and water. Cockroaches are usually found where food is eaten and crumbs are left behind. Remove as many water and food sources as you can because cockroaches need food and water to survive. At least every 2 to 3 days, vacuum or sweep areas that might attract cockroaches. You can also use roach traps or gels to decrease the number of cockroaches in your home.

Pets

Furry pets may trigger an asthma attack. When a furry pet is suspected of causing asthma attacks, the simplest solution is to find the pet another home. If pet owners are too attached to their pets or are unable to locate a safe, new home for the pet, they should keep the pet out of the bedroom of the person with asthma.

Pets should be bathed weekly and kept outside as much as possible. People with asthma are not allergic to their pet's fur, so trimming your pet's fur will not help your asthma. If you have a furry pet, vacuum often to clean up anything that could cause an asthma attack. If your floors have a hard surface, such as wood or tile, and are not carpeted, damp mop them every week.

Mold

Inhaling or breathing in mold can cause an asthma attack. Get rid of mold in all parts of your home to help control your asthma attacks. Keep the humidity level in your home between 35% and 50%. In hot, humid climates, you may need to use an air conditioner or a dehumidifier or both. Fix water leaks, which allow mold to grow behind walls and under floors.

Wood Smoke

Smoke from burning wood is made up of a mix of harmful gases and small particles. Breathing in too much of this smoke can cause an asthma attack.

Other Triggers

Infections linked to influenza (flu), colds, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) can trigger an attack. Sinus infections, allergies, breathing in some chemicals, and acid reflux can irritate airways and trigger asthma attacks.

Strenuous physical exercise; some medicines; bad weather, such as thunderstorms; high humidity; breathing in cold, dry air; biomass smoke from burning grass or other vegetation; and some foods and food additives can trigger an asthma attack.

Strong emotional states can also lead to hyperventilation and an asthma attack.

Learn what triggers your attacks so that you can avoid the triggers whenever possible. Be alert for a possible attack when the triggers cannot be avoided.

Remember, you can control your asthma!

The above text is from the "[You Can Control Your Asthma](http://www.cdc.gov/asthma/pdfs/asthma_brochure.pdf)" (http://www.cdc.gov/asthma/pdfs/asthma_brochure.pdf) [PDF, 4074KB] full-color brochure and is suitable for downloading and printing.

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1600 Clifton Rd. Atlanta, GA 30333, USA
800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) TTY: (888) 232-6348 - cdcinfo@cdc.gov