



How to Control Things that Make Your Asthma Worse

You can help prevent asthma attacks by staying away from 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 (triggers). 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 list below. Put a check mark next to the ones that you know make your asthma worse. Ask your provider to help you find out what else may trigger your asthma. Then, decide with your provider 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 provider for ways to help you quit. Ask family members to quit smoking, too.
- Do not allow smoking in your home or around you.

Dust mites

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

Most effective approach:

- 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.

Approach:

- Reduce indoor humidity to less than 50 percent, by using a dehumidifier or central air conditioner.
- Try not to sleep or lie on cloth-covered cushions or furniture.
- Remove carpeting from your bedroom and where laid over concrete floors, if you can.

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 upholstered furniture from your home. If that is not possible, keep the pet out of these rooms.

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 you once or twice a week, if you can. Stay out of rooms while they are being vacuumed and for a short time afterward.
- If you must 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 provider whether you need to begin 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 provider if you have asthma symptoms when you are active - like when you exercise, do sports, play, or work hard.
- Ask your provider 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

- Influenza: Get a flu shot yearly.
- Sulfites in foods: Avoid beer, wine, grape juice, wine vinegar, pickles, sauerkraut, lemon or lime juice (unless frozen), shrimp, molasses, dried fruit (except dark raisin and prunes), 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 provider about all the medicines you might 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 are a registered University of Illinois student and 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>