



## Frequently Asked Questions

# Asthma TRIGGERS

### Q What are asthma triggers?

**A** The most common asthma triggers are allergic substances (allergens), environmental irritants, certain medications, gastric reflux, or infections that can lead to asthma symptoms and a possible asthma attack.

### Q Why identify asthma triggers?

**A** Identifying and avoiding, when possible, your asthma triggers may decrease asthma symptoms and prevent or lessen the severity of asthma attacks. When triggers are unavoidable, for example when exercising, your doctor may advise that you pre-treat yourself with your rescue medications to avoid asthma symptoms or an asthma attack.

### Q What happens when you come in contact with a trigger?

**A** When you come in contact with a trigger, your airways produce thick mucus and become more inflamed and swollen. Your airway openings become smaller and the muscles tighten, making it harder for you to breathe.

### Q What are common asthma triggers?

**A** Common asthma triggers include:

- allergens, such as:
  - dust and dust mites
  - pet dander
  - mold and mildew
  - pollen
  - cockroaches
- irritants:
  - tobacco smoke and air pollution, such as smoke, fumes, etc.
  - perfumes and body deodorant
  - cold air, high humidity, changes in weather
  - air conditioning
  - strong chemical smells (paint, cleaning fluids, etc.)
- other:
  - upper respiratory infections, such as colds, flu, and sinus infections
  - certain foods like shellfish, peanuts, and drinks with sulfites (such as wine)
  - gastroesophageal reflux disease
  - stress and strong emotions, including fear, crying, and laughing
  - sports and exercise, especially in cold weather or with overexertion
  - medications, such as aspirin

## Q How do I identify my asthma triggers?

**A** You can identify your asthma triggers in the following ways:

- **Notice what triggers** your asthma symptoms, and keep a list to share with your health care provider and family.
- **Monitor your peak flow.** Even when you do not have symptoms, your airways may react to a trigger and cause your lungs to work harder. Ask your health care provider how often you should routinely measure your peak flow and know your personal best. Check your peak flows when you are having symptoms. Record these readings and share them with your health care provider.
- **Allergy testing** may be used to identify allergies to specific substances.

## Q How can I reduce asthma triggers in my home?

**A** You can reduce asthma triggers in the following ways:

- **Eliminate indoor mold.** Mold grows when moisture is present. Fix all leaky plumbing. Use a dehumidifier to keep indoor humidity at less than 50%. Use bleach to destroy mold. Avoid wall to wall carpeting in the bathroom and on basement or concrete floors.
- **Minimize dust mites.** Keep your home as dust free as possible. Cover mattresses, pillows, and box springs with zippered, dust-proof covers. Once a week wash sheets and blankets in hot water and dry in a dryer. Replace feather and down-filled pillows, quilts, and cushions with those filled with man-made fibers. Remove carpeting from bedroom areas when possible, or vacuum often.
- **Avoid smoking.** Smoke from cigarettes, cigars, and pipes are common asthma triggers for both the smoker and other people in the home. Asthma symptoms or an asthma attack may also occur from contact with the smoker's clothing or from the smoke that lingers in the home after the smoker has left.
- **Reduce pet dander.** Pet dander can trigger asthma attacks. Pets should be kept outside of the home. If pets are kept inside, they should not be allowed in your bedroom.
- **Implement environmental controls.** Avoid exposure to wood dust and strong odors such as cleaners, perfumes, paint and paint remover fumes, and other similar triggers. If you must use them, wear a mask and provide adequate ventilation. Air conditioning will control the temperature in your home and prevent outside pollen and molds from entering your home.

## Q How would I recognize an asthma attack?

**A** Your symptoms may include increased and thicker mucus, tightness in your chest, difficulty sleeping, increased and worsened coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, and rapid breathing. Each person's symptoms may be different. Talk to your health care provider about your symptoms and about putting together an asthma response plan that will help you manage your symptoms when attacks occur.

## Q How can I avoid asthma symptoms when I exercise?

**A** A person with asthma generally is able to exercise. Talk to your health care provider about the best way to control your asthma when you exercise and the best types of exercise for you to do. Your doctor may advise that you use your rescue medications prior to exercising to avoid symptoms. Avoid exercise when you have respiratory infections.

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Sources: Healthwise® Knowledgebase; American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI) [www.aaaai.org/](http://www.aaaai.org/)

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