

How to Avoid Allergy and Asthma Triggers

Allergies and asthma are often triggered by exposure to indoor and outdoor environmental factors. Avoidance of these irritants and allergens is the first and most important step in alleviating the symptoms of allergy and asthma. Failure to eliminate exposure to these triggers often leads to poor control of symptoms, even when taking appropriate medication. The following steps will help minimize exposure to allergy and asthma triggers.

- Do not smoke inside the house or automobile. Tobacco smoke is a potent airway irritant that causes serious illness, and sometimes hospitalization, in exposed children who have asthma and allergies. Smoking in a part of the house that is remote from your child will not prevent exposure. Smoke will rapidly spread throughout the indoor area. Smoke from a wood-burning stove or fireplace is also a problem that should be avoided.
- All pets that have fur or feathers can cause allergies. These include dogs, cats, birds, hamsters and guinea pigs. Such pets should be removed from the home if they trigger asthma and allergy symptoms. Pet allergen may persist for months after the pet is removed. It may take some time for symptoms to improve. If the pet is not removed, keep it out of the bedroom and wash it at least once weekly to reduce spread of pet saliva and dander. There are no hypoallergenic cats or dogs.
- Dust mites are a common and potent allergen. They are tiny insects that live in house dust, especially in mattresses, pillows and upholstered furniture. Reducing dust mite exposure has been shown to be effective in preventing and alleviating symptoms of asthma and allergy. Place pillows and mattress in airtight plastic covers (available at local home stores). Tape over the length of the zipper. Avoid use of stuffed "comforters." Use a washable cotton blanket instead. Wash all bedding weekly in water that is at least 130° F. Remove carpeting from the bedroom. Use window shades or blinds made of plastic or wood instead of curtains and drapes. Remove stuffed animals and upholstered furniture from the bedroom. Do not sit or lie on upholstered furniture. Clean surface dust as often as possible using a damp mop or cloth. Those with allergies or asthma should stay clear of areas that are being dusted or vacuumed. Dust mites thrive in moisture and high humidity. Avoid vaporizers and humidifiers. Air conditioning helps to reduce humidity and can also filter allergens. High efficiency particle filters can be purchased for central air conditioning units to improve allergen filtration. A dehumidifier will help lower humidity.
- Mold and mildew are common allergens. They thrive in moisture and high humidity. Bathrooms, kitchens and basements are problem areas. Keep these areas well ventilated and clean often with dilute household bleach or other products that retard mold and mildew. House plants harbor molds and should be avoided.
- Cockroaches (palmetto bugs) are allergenic. Careful cleaning may prevent infestation as cockroaches feed on food particles. You may need a professional exterminator to eradicate these insects once they are established.
- Avoid exposure to strong odors and fumes such as perfume, fresh paint, cleaning chemicals and room deodorizers.