

# HOW TO CONTROL Asthma Triggers



Asthma triggers are things in the indoor and outdoor environment that can make your asthma worse. Asthma triggers range from dust mites and pet dander in the home to pollen and air pollution outside. This fact sheet will help you identify your asthma triggers, teach you how to avoid them, and explain what you can do to make your home and surroundings more asthma-friendly.

## Allergens

### □ ANIMAL DANDER

Some people are allergic to the flakes of skin or dried saliva from animals with fur or hair.

The best thing to do:

- Keep pets with fur or hair out of your home.

If you must have a pet, then:

- Keep the pet out of your bedroom and other sleeping areas, and keep the door closed.
- Remove carpets and cloth furniture from your home. If you can't do that, keep the pet away from cloth furniture and carpets.

### □ DUST MITES

Many people who have asthma are allergic to dust mites. Dust mites are tiny bugs (too small to see) that are found in every home—in dust, mattresses, pillows, carpets, cloth furniture, sheets and blankets, clothes, stuffed toys, and other cloth-covered items.

Things that may help:

- Put your mattress and pillow in special dust-proof covers.
- Wash sheets and blankets on your bed each week in hot water. Water must be hotter than 130 °F to kill the dust mites. Cold or warm water used with detergent and bleach can also kill dust mites.

- Reduce indoor humidity to below 60 percent. Between 30 and 50 percent is best. Dehumidifiers or central air conditioners can do this.
- Try not to sleep or lie on cloth cushions.
- Remove carpets from your bedroom and those laid on concrete.
- Keep stuffed toys off of the bed or sleeping area. Wash stuffed toys weekly in hot water or cooler water with detergent and bleach. Dust mites can also be killed by placing stuffed animals in the freezer overnight in a plastic bag.

### □ COCKROACHES

Many people who have asthma are allergic to the dried droppings and remains of cockroaches.

The best things to do:

- Keep food and garbage in closed containers.
- Never leave food, dirty dishes, or standing water 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 of the room until the odor goes away.

*Continued on reverse* ▶



#### INDOOR MOLD

- Fix leaky faucets, pipes, or other sources of water that have mold around them.
- Scrub mold off hard surfaces with soap and water, and dry completely. Wear gloves to avoid touching mold with your bare hands. If you use a cleaner with bleach or a strong smell, always ventilate the area.

#### 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 from late morning to afternoon, if you can. Pollen and some mold spore counts are highest at that time.
- If you do go outside, change your clothes as soon as you get inside and put dirty clothes in a covered hamper or container to avoid spreading allergens inside your home.
- Ask your doctor whether you need to take or increase anti-inflammatory medicine before your allergy season starts.

### Irritants

#### TOBACCO SMOKE

- If you smoke, ask your doctor for ways to help you quit. Ask family members to quit smoking, too.
- Do not allow smoking in your home or car.

#### SMOKE, STRONG ODORS, SPRAYS, AND FUMES

- If possible, do not use a wood-burning stove, kerosene heater, or fireplace. Vent gas stoves to outside.

- Try to stay away from strong odors and sprays—such as perfume, talcum powder, hair spray, and paints.

### Other things that bring on asthma symptoms in some people include:

#### VACUUM CLEANING

- Try to get someone else to vacuum for you once or twice a week. Stay out of rooms while they are being vacuumed and for a short while afterward.
- If you 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.

#### OTHER THINGS THAT CAN MAKE ASTHMA WORSE

- **Sulfites (used to prevent spoiling) in foods and beverages:** Do not drink beer or wine or eat dried fruit, instant potatoes, or shrimp if they cause asthma symptoms.
- **Cold air:** Cover your nose and mouth with a scarf on cold or windy days.
- **Other medicines:** Tell your doctor or other health care professional about all the medicines you take. Include cold medicines, aspirin, vitamins and other supplements, and nonselective beta blockers (used, for example, in eye drops and medicines for anxiety and high blood pressure).
- **Infections:** Certain lung infections like a cold or the flu may also make your asthma worse.