Asthma Triggers

Things that cause asthma (AZZ-muh) attacks or make asthma worse are called triggers. Asthma triggers can be found in your home, your child's school, child care, and other people's homes.

Common Asthma Triggers

Allergens (AL-er-jinz) are things your child may be allergic to.

- House dust mites—tiny bugs you can't see. They live in carpets, drapes, cloth furniture, pillows, mattresses, and dust.
- Animal dander—tiny flakes of skin from furry animals like cats and dogs. You can't see animal dander.
- Cockroaches
- Mold
- Pollen (PAH-lin)—the dust from plants.

Sinus (SYE-nis) **and lung infections.** The sinuses are spaces inside your head, behind your nose. They can get infected. Pneumonia (nuh-MOH-nyuh) is a kind of lung infection.

Things your child breathes in.

- Tobacco and other smoke
- Air pollution
- Cold or dry air
- Perfumes, chemicals, and cleaning products
- Fumes from gas or kerosene heaters and fireplaces

Exercise. Some people with asthma **wheeze***, cough, and get a tight feeling in the chest when they exercise. But they can still be active. There are medicines to use before exercise.

* Words to Know

asthma action plan—a plan you write with your child's doctor. It lists the medicines your child takes. It also tells what to do if your child has an asthma attack.

wheeze (weez) or **wheezing** (weez-ing)—high-pitched whistling sound when breathing.

Avoiding Triggers

You *can't* get rid of *all* the asthma triggers in your home. But there's still a lot you *can* do. Here are some tips:

Don't smoke. And don't let anyone else smoke in your home or car.

Protect your child from dust and dust mites.

- Cover your child's mattress and pillows with allergy-proof covers.
- Wash your child's bedding in hot water every 1 to 2 weeks.
- Make sure your child's stuffed toys can be cleaned in a washing machine every 1 to 2 weeks. Check the label.
- Vacuum and dust often.
- Take carpet out of the bedroom.
- Use a HEPA air filter in the bedroom. This special kind of filter cleans the air. You can buy one at some drugstores.

Keep pets away.

- Try to find new homes for furry pets.
- Keep pets out of your child's bedroom.
- Wash pets often.

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Control cockroaches.

- Repair holes in walls, cupboards, and floors.
- Set roach traps.
- Don't leave out food, water, or trash.
- Don't use bug sprays or bombs.
- Call an exterminator (ex-TUR-muh-nay-tur).

Prevent mold. Floods, leaks, or dampness in the air can cause mold.

- Fix any leaks.
- Use exhaust fans in the bathrooms and kitchen.
- Use a dehumidifier (dee-hyoo-MID-uh-fye-ur) in damp parts of the house. A dehumidifier is a machine that takes dampness out of the air.
- Clean mold with water and detergent.
- Replace moldy wallboards.

Keep pollen away. If your child has hay fever:

- Find out when pollen is high in your area. Check with your child's doctor, your local newspaper, or the Internet.
- Put an air conditioner in your child's bedroom. Close the fresh air vent when pollen is high.
- Keep doors and windows closed.

Keep strong smells out of the house.

- Use unscented cleaning products.
- Avoid mothballs, air fresheners, perfumes, and scented candles.

Keep your child indoors when the air quality is very poor. Air quality is how clean or dirty the air is. It can change from day to day.

- Check weather reports or the Internet for air quality news.

What Is Asthma?

Asthma is a disease of the breathing tubes that carry air to the lungs. The linings of the tubes swell, and they fill up with mucus (MYOO-kus). This is called inflammation (in-fluh-MAY-shun). It makes the tubes get narrow. This makes it hard to breathe.

Asthma can cause sickness, hospital stays, and even death. But children with asthma can live normal lives.

Signs of Asthma

Symptoms of asthma can be different for each person. They can come quickly or start slowly and they can change. Symptoms may include:

- Coughing.
- Trouble breathing.
- **Wheezing*.**
- Shortness of breath.
- Tightness in the chest.
- Trouble exercising.

What to Do for Asthma

- There is no cure for asthma. But you can help control it. Your child will likely need one or more medicines. Using them right is **very** important.
- Make a plan for what to do for your child's asthma, wherever he or she is.
- Talk with teachers, the school nurse, office staff, and coaches. They need to know your child has asthma, what medicines your child takes, and what to do in an emergency. They need copies of your child's **asthma action plan*.**

To learn more, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Web site at www.aap.org.
Your child's doctor will tell you to do what's best for your child.
This information should not take the place of talking with your child's doctor.

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