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Controlling the home environment is a very important part of asthma and allergy care

WHAT ARE ASTHMA AND ALLERGY TRIGGERS?

If you or someone you know have allergic symptoms or asthma, you are sensitive to "triggers," including particles carried in the air. These "triggers" can set off a reaction in your lungs and other parts of your body. Triggers can be found indoors or outdoors. They can be simple things like:

- Cold air.
- Tobacco smoke and wood smoke.
- Perfume, paint, hair spray, or any strong odors or fumes.
- Allergens (particles that cause allergies) such as dust mites, pollen, molds, pollution, and animal dander (which are tiny scales or particles that fall off hair, feathers or skin) from any pets.
- Common cold, influenza, and other respiratory illnesses.

You may be able to add more triggers to this list. Other things may also trigger your asthma or allergies. It's important to learn which triggers are a problem for you. Ask your doctor to help. Your doctor may suggest:

- Keeping an asthma diary.
- Skin testing to test for allergies.
- A special diet to look for food allergies.

- Cold air.

Finding triggers isn't always easy. If you do know your triggers, cutting down exposure to them may help avoid asthma and allergy attacks.

If you don't know your triggers, try to limit your exposure to one suspected trigger at a time. Watch to see if you get better. This may show you if the trigger was a problem for you.

REDUCING TRIGGERS IN THE HOME

Here are some common triggers and some ways to help control them at home:

Tobacco Smoke

Smoke should not be allowed in the home of someone with asthma or allergies. Ask family members and friends to smoke outdoors. Suggest that they quit smoking. Your local American Lung Association can help. Ask your Lung Association how you can help a family member or friend quit smoking.

Wood Smoke

Wood smoke is a problem for children and adults with asthma and allergies. Avoid wood stoves and fireplaces.

Pets

Almost all pets can cause allergies, including dogs and especially cats. Small animals like birds, hamsters and guinea pigs can cause problems, so all pets should be removed from the home if pets trigger asthma and allergy symptoms.

Pet allergen may stay in the home for months after the pet is gone because it remains in house dust. Allergy and asthma symptoms may take some time to get better.

If the pet stays in the home, keep it out of the bedroom of anyone with asthma or allergies. Weekly pet baths may help cut down the amount of pet saliva and dander in the home.

Sometimes you hear that certain cats or dogs are "non-allergenic." There really is no such thing as a "non-allergenic" cat or dog, especially if the pet leaves dander and saliva in the home. Goldfish and other tropical fish may be a good substitute.

Cockroaches

Even cockroaches can cause problems, so it's important to get rid of roaches in your home. The

cockroach allergen comes from dead roaches and roach droppings. It collects in house dust and is hard to remove. Careful cleaning (see tips under "Dust Mites") of your home will help.

Indoor Mold

When humidity is high, molds can be a problem in bathrooms, kitchens, and basements. Make sure these areas have good air circulation and are cleaned often. The basement in particular may need a dehumidifier. And remember, the water in the dehumidifier must be emptied and the container cleaned often to prevent forming mildew.

Molds may form on foam pillows when you perspire. To prevent mold, put the pillow in an airtight cover and tape the cover shut. Wash the pillow every week, and make sure to change it every year.

Molds also form in house plants, so check them often. You may have to keep all plants outdoors.

Strong Odors or Fumes

Perfume, room deodorizers, cleaning chemicals, paint, and talcum powder are examples of triggers that must be avoided or kept to very low levels.

Dust Mites

Dust mites are tiny, microscopic spiders usually found in house dust. Several thousand mites can be found in a pinch of dust. Mites are one of the major triggers for people with allergies and asthma. They need the most work to remove.

Use an allergy control solution, a cleaner that can kill the mite allergen. Check with your doctor or pharmacist about what cleaner to buy.

Following these rules can also help get rid of dust mites:

- Put mattresses in airtight covers. Tape over the length of the zipper.
- Put pillows in airtight covers. Tape over the length of the zipper. Or wash the pillow every week.
- Wash all bedding every week in water that is at least 130 degrees F. Removing the bedspread at night may help.
- Don't sleep or lie down on upholstered (stuffed) furniture.
- Remove carpeting in the bedroom.

- Clean up surface dust as often as possible. Use a damp mop or damp cloth when you clean. Don't use aerosols or spray cleaners in the bedroom. And don't clean or vacuum the room when someone with asthma or allergies is present.
- Window coverings attract dust. Use window shades or curtains made of plastic or other washable material for easy cleaning.
- Remove stuffed furniture and stuffed animals (unless the animals can be washed), and anything under the bed.
- Closets need extra care. They should hold only needed clothing. Putting clothes in a plastic garment bag may help. (Do not use the plastic bag that covers dry cleaning).
- Dust mites like moisture and high humidity. Cutting down the humidity in your home can cut down the number of mites. A dehumidifier may help.
- Air filters may be of limited help by keeping your home cleaner and more comfortable. Ask your doctor for advice about air filters.
- Cover bedroom air vents with several layers of cheesecloth to lower the number of large-size allergen particles coming into the bedroom.

GENERAL RULES TO HELP CONTROL THE HOME ENVIRONMENT

Controlling the home environment is a very important part of asthma and allergy care. Some general rules for home control for all members of the family are:

- Reduce or remove as many asthma and allergy triggers from your home as possible.
- If possible, use air filters and air conditioners to make your home cleaner and more comfortable.
- Pay attention to the problem of dust mites. Work hard to control this problem in the bedroom.
- Vacuum cleaners stir up dust and allergens in the air. A vacuum cleaner with an air filter or a central vacuum cleaner with a collection bag outside the home may be of limited value. Anyone with asthma or allergies should avoid vacuuming. If vacuuming must be done, a dust mask may help.

