

Protecting Yourself from Air Pollution



Asthma symptoms can increase when you are exposed to air pollution. However, you can take some basic steps to reduce your risk from exposure and avoid an asthma attack. Ozone and particle pollution found in outside air can cause an asthma attack in adults and children or worsen existing symptoms. If you notice your symptoms worsening when you are outside or active, or if they worsen a day or so after you have been active outside, you may be sensitive to air pollution. Discussing an action plan with your doctor and following the easy steps listed at right will help you decrease your risk of an asthma attack.

- Listen to TV or radio reports on local air quality and become familiar with the air quality patterns in your area.
- Learn how sensitive you are—and to which types of pollutants.
- Plan exercise when pollution levels are lower.
- Reduce your outdoor activities when pollution levels are high.
- If your body starts exhibiting asthma symptoms, stop your activity.
- Keep rescue medicines nearby.
- Ask your doctor what symptoms to look for and how to treat them.
- Don't exercise near busy roads or factories.

Resource:
"Asthma and Outdoor Air Pollution"
United States Environmental
Protection Agency
EPA-452-F-04-002

Health Information Audio Library
Available 24 hours a day,
7 days a week at: 877-217-7946

Health and Wellness web site:
www.humana-military.com

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Asthma Disease Management Newsletter

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Household Cleaning Sprays Could Cause an Increase in Asthma Symptoms



By simply limiting the use of spray cleaners and air fresheners in the home, research indicates you could reduce respiratory difficulties. Studies now suggest

that spray products readily available in the local supermarket should not be considered harmless and may even pose a serious health risk.

Research shows a 50% increase in respiratory difficulties related to the use of cleaning sprays in the

home—even when used as little as once per week. Cleaning sprays, air fresheners, furniture and glass cleaners have a very strong effect on the respiratory system, and should be used sparingly or replaced by alternative non-spray liquid products.

If you must spray, you can protect yourself and others by opening windows, by being very careful not to spray or use near the nose and mouth and by wearing a mask or other device that will protect your respiratory system.

Reference:
"Home Spray Cleaners Could Raise Asthma Risk"
http://www.healthcentral.com/allergy/news-161889-31_pf.html

Learning the Symptoms of an Allergic Reaction

Allergic reactions can be mild—or they can be life threatening. If you have any of the reactions listed below, you should call your physician and report your symptoms as soon as possible.

The U.S. National Library of Medicine lists these symptoms as the ones to watch for:

- Skin rash or skin that itches
- Hives, especially on the neck or face
- Eyes that are red and watery
- Nasal congestion

And these more serious symptoms should be reported to your physician immediately:

- Difficulty breathing
- Dizziness
- Chest or abdominal pain



- Feeling anxious or nervous
- Swelling of any part of your body

Prompt attention to these symptoms can help eliminate possible complications.

Reference:
http://www.healthcentral.com/allergy/news-210341-22_pf.html

Humana Military Healthcare Services
P.O. Box 740017
Louisville, KY 40201





Gene Mutation Found to Increase Asthma Risk

Researchers have determined that a small change in one gene, when it's inherited from both parents, can cause the release of high levels of a specific protein associated with asthma risk.

This genetic variation causes the release of a protein which is thought to be a defense mechanism against certain harmful parasites. These parasites contain a substance normally found in fungi, crustaceans, dust mites and cockroaches. The protein thus inappropriately alerts the body to the "imagined" presence of this substance, generating asthmatic responses. Research has also shown that this specific protein is also involved in the development of other inflammatory diseases.

Although not the final answer concerning an asthma cure, this development will take researchers in another direction: towards tailoring medications to remove the cause of asthma and not just treating the symptoms.

Resource:
http://www.healthcentral.com/allergy/news-225175-31_pf.html

The Importance of a Peak Flow Meter In Managing Asthma

A peak flow meter is a hand held device that measures how fast air flows out of your lungs. It can be beneficial for patients with asthma. It is especially helpful when your doctor is adjusting your asthma medications. Many physicians feel peak flow meters are most helpful for asthma patients with moderate to severe asthma. Peak flow readings can help you and your provider monitor your asthma and prescribe treatment. A peak flow meter can be helpful to use along with the action plan that your doctor has set for you.



A peak flow meter can be used to determine if you need to see or talk with your provider about a change in your asthma treatment. A peak flow meter can often let you know if your asthma is getting worse. When your asthma is under control, your airway is open and you can force air out of your lungs and into your peak flow meter. When your airways are inflamed and constricted, you can't force air out of your lungs as fast and into your peak flow meter, resulting in a lower reading. You may actually show a decrease in your peak flow readings before you show symptoms. These readings can allow your doctor to adjust your treatment plan before your condition worsens and often prevent an emergency room visit.

Knowing your personal best peak flow meter reading helps you to evaluate your current readings and utilize the asthma action plan that your provider has completed for you. Check with your doctor before you start using your peak flow meter to make sure you are using the correct technique. Use of a peak flow meter is not a substitute for regular visits to your provider. Ask your doctor about developing an asthma action plan and determining your peak flow zones. Talk with your doctor to see if a peak flow meter should be part of your asthma management.

Sources:
www.lungusa.org
www.mayoclinic.com

Exercise Induced Asthma (EIA)



Exercise induced asthma (EIA) occurs during or after exercise. Patients experience difficulty breathing after exercising for 5-20 minutes. Symptoms include, wheezing, coughing, chest pain and/or tightness, and prolonged shortness of air. If you have been diagnosed with EIA, talk with your doctor about a personalized management plan.

Patients with EIA have airways that are extra sensitive to sudden changes in temperature and humidity. This occurs most often when breathing colder, drier air. During exercise most people tend to breath through their mouth which allows the cold air to reach the lower airway without the warming and humidifying effects of the nose.

The type and duration of exercise will vary for each individual. Some activities are better suited for individuals with EIA. Swimming, walking, hiking and leisurely biking are some exercises that can be done individually. If you enjoy exercising with others, you may want to consider: softball, football, wrestling, golfing or gymnastics. Even short track and field events are possible when precautions are taken to prevent EIA.

Swimming is usually the sport of choice and seems to be the least asthma provoking exercise although, excessively chlorinated pools can provoke an episode.

Many asthma patients have found that with proper training and medical treatment they are able to compete as runners and even basketball players.

Tips for preventing exercise induced asthma:

- Inhaled medications taken prior to exercise are often helpful in controlling symptoms and preventing bronchospasms brought on by exercise. A medication often chosen by physicians to prevent EIA symptoms is a short acting beta 2 agonist bronchodilator spray used 15 minutes prior to exercise. This type of medication can also be used to treat symptoms as they occur. If symptoms are not controlled by medications, patients should talk with their doctor.
- Avoid exercise if you are having breathing difficulties before starting exercise.
- Before you begin exercising you should warm up your body muscles. Walking, stretching and running in place for short periods of time are excellent choices.
- Avoid exercise when you will likely be exposed to other asthma triggers such as dust, pollen, animal dander, air pollutants. Try to choose a place to exercise where the risk of exposure to these irritants is low.
- If you are exercising or work outdoors during cold weather, limit your exposure and try wearing a scarf or cold air mask to warm and moisten the air before it reaches you airways.
- Be sure to perform a cooldown after your exercise session. When the temperature and humidity in your airways change too rapidly, an asthma attack could be induced.
- Whenever possible, check the air quality index prior to beginning activity. Try not to exercise, work or play when the pollution or pollen levels are high.

Sources: *American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology* www.aaaai.org
American Lung Association www.lungusa.org