

# Avoiding What Makes Asthma Worse

**Many different things can make asthma worse, or bring on asthma symptoms. These are different for each person.**

**Sometimes two or more things work together to bring on asthma symptoms.**

Find out what things make your child's asthma worse. Then you can learn how to help your child avoid these things. Some common things that bring on asthma symptoms are described below.

## **Irritants**

Things that bother or irritate the nose, throat, or airways are called irritants. Common things like smoke, sprays, odors and air pollution can make asthma worse.

Tobacco smoke is a major problem for people with asthma. Children who live with smokers are sick more often and have more problems with asthma compared to children who live with non-smokers.

### **How to avoid them:**

Because tobacco smoke bothers airways, it is very important that no one smoke in your house or car. Never allow smoking in your child's bedroom. When you are in public, always sit in non-smoking sections. Encourage family members and friends to quit smoking. Tell them that this is the best thing they can do for themselves and for your child.

Smoke and fumes from some heating sources also can bother your child. Make sure your stove and fireplace are vented properly.

Strong-smelling things also can make asthma worse. Smells from spray cans, perfumes and



strong cleaning products may bother your child's airways. Choose unscented products for use in your home. Ask people who visit your home not to wear scented hair sprays or perfume when they come over.

## Allergies

As we explained before, an allergy is when your body has a reaction to something you breathe or eat. Signs of allergies are itchy eyes, a runny nose and skin rashes. Allergies also can swell up the airways. This can bring on asthma symptoms.

Every child's allergies are different and many children have no allergies. However, if your child has any, it is very important to try to avoid them.

To keep your child's asthma under control, you need to know if he or she has any allergies. Talk with your doctor about having your child tested for allergies. This test should always be ordered by an expert called a board certified allergist.

There are many kinds of allergies. We describe six kinds and the ways to avoid them.



### 1. Outdoor Allergies

**From tree, grass and weed pollens and mold spores.**

#### **How to avoid them:**

- Use air conditioning if you can.
- Keep windows and doors closed when pollen and mold counts are high (these counts are often reported on the TV news and in the newspaper).
- Keep your child away from wet leaves and garden trash.
- Do not let your child mow the lawn.

## **2. Indoor Mold (mildew)**

**Mold that grows on damp surfaces.**

### **How to avoid them:**

- Keep bathrooms, kitchens and basements aired out and dry. Use an exhaust fan.
- Clean bathrooms, kitchens and basements with a mold-killing or mold-preventing product.
- Do not use a humidifier or swamp cooler.

## **3. Warm-blooded Animals**

**Including dogs, cats, small rodents and birds.**

**These animals leave behind dander, urine, feces and saliva that can make allergies worse.**

### **How to avoid them:**

- Do not keep any furry or feathered pets.
- If you have a pet, give it away. If you must keep it, make sure it stays outside. If the pet is inside, keep it out of your child's bedroom at all times. Keep the bedroom door closed. Put a filter over air vents in your child's bedroom.
- If you must get a pet, choose one without fur or feathers.
- Avoid visits to friends and relatives with pets. Ask your doctor about medicine your child can take before you visit homes with pets.

## **4. House Dust Mites**

**Insects so tiny that you cannot see them. They are found in humid climates. Mites live in dust from mattresses, pillows, carpets, fabric-covered furniture, bed covers, clothes and soft toys.**

### **How to avoid them:**

- Put your child's mattress and box springs in an airtight cover.
- Put your child's pillow in an airtight cover or wash it once a week.
- Wash your child's sheets and blankets once a week in very hot water (130 degrees).
- Do not use a humidifier or swamp cooler.

**Find out what makes your child's asthma worse.**

**Then you can learn to help your child avoid these things.**



## 5. Cockroaches

**Cockroaches are common in big cities and humid climates.**

### **How to avoid them:**

- Do not leave food or trash out. Empty the garbage every day.
- Use poison baits, boric acid or traps. Do not let children eat these.
- Spray for roaches only when your child is not home. Air out your home before your child returns.

## 6. Food Allergies

**Food allergies are common in children ages 5 and under. Food allergies usually do not bring on asthma symptoms, but in rare cases they do. Nuts, eggs, milk, seafood and peanuts are foods that people may be allergic to.**

### **How to avoid them:**

- If you think your child has a food allergy, ask for tests from a board certified allergist. Talk to an expert before you remove important foods from your child's diet.

## Allergy Shots

If your child's allergies are very strong, your doctor may suggest allergy shots. These shots work well on pollen, mold, dust mite and cat allergies.

Allergy shots do not work quickly. It may take six months to a year to see a change. Allergy shots are usually given for three to five years. Allergy shots do not help everyone.

## Exercise

Many children have asthma symptoms while running and playing. They may cough or wheeze (make a whistling sound in breathing). They may feel short of breath during or after exercise. They may tire quickly and have a hard

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time keeping up with their friends. This is called exercise-induced asthma.

Children with exercise-induced asthma need to stay active. Exercise and sports will help them grow up strong and healthy.

Children with exercise-induced asthma enjoy many sports such as swimming, basketball and bike riding. Some children with exercise-induced asthma have even grown up to be Olympic athletes. Your child can, too!

If your child has exercise-induced asthma, talk to your doctor about what to do. There are medicines that block exercise-induced asthma.

Teach your child to watch for asthma symptoms during exercise. When your child has symptoms, it is important to take a short rest.

Talk to teachers and coaches about your child's exercise-induced asthma. That way they will support your efforts to control it.

## **Sickness**

The cold and flu season can be hard for children with asthma. A cold, flu, or virus can bring on asthma symptoms. If your child gets sick a lot, your child may suffer a lot from asthma, too. To control the asthma, help your child stay healthy.

Good hand washing is the best way to stop the spread of germs. Hand washing is important at home, school and the day care center.

Talk with your doctor about the flu vaccine for your child. A vaccine is a shot that can prevent a disease. The flu vaccine is given once a year, in the fall.

## Sinusitis

The sinuses are air pockets inside the head. Sometimes these air pockets swell up and get puffy. Then extra mucus gets clogged in them. This is called sinusitis.

Sinusitis can bring on asthma symptoms, especially at night. A bad case of sinusitis can lead to infection. A sinus infection may need to be treated with medicine called antibiotics.

It is important to keep the sinuses healthy. Good sinus care means keeping the swelling down and helping mucus drain out of the sinuses.

Talk to your doctor about nasal washes. Nasal washes help keep mucus and bacteria out of the nose and sinuses. Your doctor can show you and your child the best way to rinse the nose.

Talk with your doctor about medicines to help swollen sinuses. A nose spray can help stop the swelling in the nose and sinuses.

If your child ever has a sinus infection, see your doctor. Thick mucus that is yellow, green or brown is a sign of a sinus infection.

## Weather

Certain types of weather may bother your child's asthma, such as:

- Wind
- Rain and damp weather
- Cold winter air
- Hot, dry weather
- Days before and after a big storm

Every child is different. There is no one type of climate that is good or bad for all children with asthma. The important thing is to watch for the types of weather that make your child's asthma worse. When that weather comes, watch your child closely for asthma symptoms. Follow your doctor's instructions for preventing an asthma attack.



## Should You Move?

Many parents wonder if their child's asthma would be better if they moved somewhere else. The answer to this question is usually "no". There is no one best place for children with asthma to live.

Your child's asthma may get better when you visit a new place. This change is usually short-lived. Sooner or later, your child's asthma will be affected by weather and allergies in this new place, too.

If you strongly feel that moving will help your child's asthma, talk with your doctor. He or she can help you decide if this is the best choice for your child's asthma.

## Acid Reflux

In some children, acid leaks out of the stomach and up the throat, causing heartburn. This is called acid reflux. The acid also may bring on asthma symptoms. For many children, acid reflux is a problem at night. If your child has heartburn and asthma symptoms, talk with your doctor about reflux. There are medicines your child can take to control it.

There are other things you can do to treat reflux. Raise the head of your child's bed by 6 to 8 inches. Do this by placing heavy blocks under the legs of the bed. Also, make sure your child does not drink or eat for two to three hours before bedtime.

Put a check in the box for what makes your child's asthma worse.

- Irritants
- Allergies
- Exercise
- Sickness
- Sinusitis
- Weather
- Acid Reflux

*There is no one "best" place for children with asthma to live.*

## Emotions

Emotions do not cause asthma, but they can bring on asthma symptoms. This is because strong feelings can lead to changes in breathing. Laughing or crying hard can lead to coughing or wheezing. So can anger, fear, excitement and stress.

It is important for all children to express their feelings. Work hard to control all the other things that make your child's asthma worse. Then your child can be free to express emotions without fear of asthma.

However, long-term stress or emotional problems can make asthma worse. If this is a concern, talk with your child's doctor about ways to deal with it.



## Nighttime Asthma

**Many children have trouble with their asthma at night. Here are a few causes of nighttime asthma:**

- **Allergies in the bedroom, such as dust mites**
- **Sinus problems**
- **Acid reflux**
- **A drop in body temperature (this is normal)**
- **Medicines wearing off**

If your child has trouble with asthma at night, talk with your doctor. Most of the things that bring on asthma symptoms at night can be controlled. There are also long-lasting asthma medicines that will allow your child to rest the whole night.

*Most of the things that bring on asthma symptoms at night can be controlled.*