

Controlling Asthma Triggers: Allergens

For many people with lung problems such as asthma or COPD, inhaling allergens leads to inflamed airways. Allergens also cause other types of reactions in some people. For example, a runny nose, itchy, watery eyes, or a skin rash. Do your best to avoid allergens that trigger symptoms. The tips below can help to lessen any reaction you may have to certain allergens.

Dust mites

Dust mites are tiny bugs too small to see or feel. But they can be a major trigger for allergy and asthma symptoms. Dust mites live in mattresses, bedding, carpets, and upholstered furniture. They can be carried on indoor dust. They thrive in warm, moist environments.

- Wash bedding in hot water (130°F/54.4°C) each week. This kills the dust mites.
- Cover mattress and pillows with special dust-mite-proof (hypoallergenic) cases.
- Don't use upholstered furniture such as sofas or chairs in the bedroom.
- Use allergy-proof filters for air conditioners and furnaces. Follow product maker's instructions for maintaining and replacing filters.
- If you can, replace wall-to-wall carpets with wood, tile, or linoleum floors. This is especially important in the bedroom.

Animals

Animals with fur or feathers often make allergens. These are shed as tiny particles called dander. Dander can float through the air or stick to carpet, clothing, and furniture.

- Choose a pet that doesn't have fur or feathers. Examples are fish and reptiles.
- Keep pets with fur or feathers out of your home. If you can't do this, be sure to keep them out of your bedroom. But keeping a pet out of your bedroom doesn't mean your bedroom is free of pet allergens. If you sit on the couch in the living room and then go into your bedroom, you have brought the pet allergen there.
- Wash your hands and clothes after handling pets.

Mold

Mold grows in damp places, such as bathrooms, basements, and closets. It can grow anywhere flooding or a fire has caused water damage. Mold can live behind the walls if there has been water damage.



Wash bedding in hot water (130°F) each week.

- Clean damp areas weekly to prevent mold growth. This includes shower stalls and sinks. You may need someone to clean these areas for you. Or, try wearing a mask.
- Run an exhaust fan while bathing. Or leave a window or door open in the bathroom.
- Repair water leaks in or around your home.
- Have someone else cut grass or rake leaves, if possible.
- Don't use vaporizers, or humidifiers. These put water into the air and encourage mold growth.

Pollen

Pollen from trees, grasses, and weeds is a common allergen. Flower pollens are generally not a problem.

- Try to learn what types of pollen affect you most. Pollen levels vary depending on the plant, the season, and the time of day.
- Use air conditioning instead of opening the windows in your home or car. In the car, choose the setting to recirculate the air, so less pollen gets in.
- Have someone else do yardwork, if possible.
- Change clothes in a mudroom when you get home if you are highly allergic to pollens. This will keep most of the pollen from entering the house.

Cockroaches and mice

Cockroaches and mice are common household pests. They also produce allergens.

- Keep your kitchen clean and dry. A leaky faucet or drain can attract roaches.
- Remove garbage from your home daily.
- Store food in tightly sealed containers. Wash dishes promptly as soon as they are used.
- Use bait stations or traps to control roaches. Avoid using chemical sprays.

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