

# Controlling Asthma Triggers in Your Home



Asthma triggers are things that cause asthma symptoms. When asthma is triggered, it can make asthma worse or even cause an asthma attack.

Talk with your doctor to figure out your triggers. Your doctor can also help you make an Asthma Action Plan. This includes ways to control your asthma triggers and what to do if your asthma gets worse. This guide will also help identify some common asthma triggers at home and show you how to control them better.

## Secondhand Smoke

Secondhand smoke is the smoke from a cigarette, cigar or pipe, exhaled by a smoker. Secondhand smoke causes cancer. Children who breathe secondhand smoke have a high risk of health problems. Breathing smoke damages lungs, especially for children.

### What can you do?

- Don't let anyone smoke near your child.
- If you smoke, get help to quit. Until then, don't smoke in your home, car, or near children.

## Dust Mites

Dust mites are tiny bugs that are too small to see. Every home has dust mites. They are found in mattresses, pillows, carpets, soft furniture, bedcovers, clothes, stuffed toys and fabric. Dust mites can trigger asthma symptoms in children, even if they do not already have asthma.



### What can you do?

- Wash bedding in hot water once a week, and dry fully.
- Use dust-proof covers on pillows and mattresses.
- Vacuum carpets and furniture once a week.
- Choose stuffed toys that you can wash. Wash them in hot water. Dry fully before giving them to your child.
- Dust often with a damp cloth.
- Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter on carpet and soft furniture. **Do this when those with asthma are not home.**

# Molds

Molds are tiny fungi that can grow quickly, mostly in damp areas. Mold spores float through the air to spread and grow more mold. When mold spores land on damp places, they can grow on the new surface. Breathing in mold spores can trigger asthma symptoms.



## What can you do?

- Clean all mold and sources of moisture in your home.
- If you see mold on hard surfaces, clean it up with soap and water. Let the area dry fully.
- Use exhaust fans or open a window in the bathroom and kitchen when showering, cooking or washing dishes.
- Fix water leaks as soon as possible to keep mold from growing.
- Dry damp or wet things fully within one to two days to keep mold from growing.

## Pets

Dogs, cats and other mammals can trigger asthma. This is often caused by an allergy to animal dander. Dander is made of tiny skin flakes that animals shed from their skin.

### What can you do?

- Keep pets outside if possible.
- If the pet is kept indoors, keep it out of the bedrooms of anyone with asthma.
- Keep pets off your furniture.
- Use an air cleaner with a HEPA filter.
- Vacuum carpets and furniture when the person with asthma is not around.

## Cockroaches and Other Pests

Cockroaches, rats and mice often look for food, water and shelter in cluttered spaces. These pests and their droppings can trigger asthma symptoms.

### What can you do?

- Insecticides and pesticides are toxic to pests and people. Try less harmful methods, like soap and oil sprays.
- Keep counters, sinks, tables and floors clean and clutter free.
- Clean dishes, crumbs and spills right away.
- Store food in airtight containers.
- Seal cracks or openings around cabinets.

# Nitrogen Dioxide

Nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) is an odorless gas that can bother your eyes, nose and throat. It can trigger asthma symptoms and cause shortness of breath. It can also make children more likely to get lung infections. Indoor NO<sub>2</sub> comes from appliances that burn fuels like gas, kerosene and wood.



## What can you do?

- Make sure all fuel-burning appliances are properly installed, used, and maintained. Be sure to follow all product instructions.
- If possible, use fuel-burning appliances that are vented to the outside.
- Gas cooking stoves: Install and use an exhaust fan vented to the outside. Never use the stove to keep you warm or heat your house.
- Unvented heaters: Use the proper fuel and keep the heater adjusted the right way. Open a window when you are using the heater.

## Outdoor Air Pollution

Outdoor air pollution and pollen can bother your lungs. This can lead to chest pain, coughing, digestive problems, sneezing, shortness of breath, and other symptoms. Outdoor air pollution and pollen may trigger allergy and asthma symptoms.

### What can you do?

- Check the Air Quality Index (AQI) on a weather application or local weather report.
- Know when and where air pollution may be bad.
- Check your local air quality to know when it is safe to be outdoors.
- Stay inside with the windows closed on high pollen days and when pollutants are high.
- Use an air cleaner with a HEPA filter.
- Remove indoor plants if they cause symptoms for you or your family.
- Watch out for asthma warning signs like wheezing. If you have symptoms, limit outdoor activity. Be sure to talk about this with your doctor.

### **For more resources:**

Visit [www.lung.org](http://www.lung.org) or call the American Lung Association at **1-866-252-2959** to speak with a Lung Health Navigator.

For resources in Spanish, visit [www.lung.org/Espanol](http://www.lung.org/Espanol)

### **For help to quit smoking:**

Contact Kick it California  
Visit: [kickitca.org](http://kickitca.org)  
Call: 1-800-300-8086  
Text: "Quit Smoking" or "Quit Vaping" to 66819

### **Breathe Well, Live Well program**

IEHP offers no-cost, in-person asthma classes for members to learn to control their asthma.

To learn more, visit:

[www.iehp.org/asthma](http://www.iehp.org/asthma)

### **IEHP Member Services:**

1-800-440-4347

1-800-718-4347 for TTY users  
Monday-Friday, 7 a.m.-7 p.m., and  
Saturday-Sunday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

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