

# Asthma Trigger Control Plan



Your asthma causes your airways to be very sensitive. They may react to triggers, which are stimuli that can cause asthma episodes. Your airways may become swollen, tighten up, and produce excess mucus when one or more triggers are present.

- ▶ Ask your doctor to help you determine your triggers.
- ▶ Ask your doctor which actions will reduce your asthma symptoms.
- ▶ Number each action in order of importance. Carry out the most important actions first, then move on to those of less importance.
- ▶ Discuss the results of these efforts with your doctor.
- ▶ If you cannot avoid certain triggers, your doctor may consider allergy shots. Allergy shots do not work for everyone.

## Common asthma triggers:

### House dust mites

Dust mites are found in most homes in bedding, upholstery, and carpeting. They excrete substances that can cause asthma symptoms.

- **Actions to gain control of dust mites:**
  - Place your mattress, box spring, and pillows in airtight covers. These are available at most department stores.
  - Wash all bedding, clothes, and stuffed toys in hot water at least once a week.
  - Keep items such as stuffed animals out of the bedroom.
  - Avoid sleeping on upholstered furniture, and decrease the amount of upholstery in the bedroom.
  - Remove carpets that are laid on concrete.
- **Actions that will help but are not essential:**
  - Use a dehumidifier, since dust mites do not survive well in humidity less than 50%.
  - Remove carpets from your bedroom.
  - Use chemical agents to kill mites in the house.
  - Avoid using a vacuum or being in a room during vacuuming.
  - If you must vacuum, one or more of the following things can be done to reduce the amount of dust:
    - ▶ Use a dust mask
    - ▶ Use a central vacuum cleaner with the collecting bag outside the house
    - ▶ Use a vacuum cleaner that has powerful suction

**Animal dander**

Animal dander are flakes in the skin, hair, or feathers of all warm-blooded pets including dogs, cats, birds, and rodents. Saliva and urine from these pets have allergens.

- Remove the animal from your house or school classroom.
- If you must have a pet, keep it out of the house as much as possible. Keep the animal out of the bedroom at all times.
- If there is forced air heating in your home and you have a pet, close the air ducts in your bedroom.
- Wash the animal once a week. This should not be done by the person who is allergic to the animal.
- Avoid visiting friends or relatives with pets. If you must visit, take preventive asthma medicine before the visit.
- Choose a pet without fur or feathers, such as a fish.
- Avoid products made with feathers, for example, pillows and comforters.
- Use a vacuum cleaner fitted with a HEPA (High-Efficiency Particulate Air) filter.
- Before moving into a house or apartment where there has been a pet, wash the walls and treat the carpets with 3% tannic acid solution. Tannic acid may discolor the carpet, so test a small area first.

**Cockroach allergens**

- Use insect sprays. Have someone else spray when you are not at home. Air out your home for a few hours after spraying. In difficult cases, a professional exterminator may need to be called.
- Use roach traps

**Tobacco smoke**

Although people are usually not allergic to tobacco smoke, it is a strong irritant which can increase asthma symptoms.

- Do not smoke.
- Do not allow smoking in your home. Ask household members to smoke outside or encourage them to quit.
- Use an indoor air cleaning device for smoke, mold, and dander.

**Pollen and outdoor molds**

- Stay indoors during the midday and afternoon when the pollen count is high.
- Use air conditioning, if possible.
- Keep windows closed during seasons when pollen and mold are highest.
- Avoid sources of molds (wet leaves, garden debris)

**Indoor Molds**

- Keep bathrooms, kitchens, and basements well aired
- Clean bathrooms, kitchens, and basements regularly
- Do not use humidifiers
- Use dehumidifiers for damp basement areas, with humidity levels set for less than 50 percent, but above 25 percent. Empty and clean the unit regularly.
- Use a fungicide to help remove molds from difficult areas. This should be done with caution, as they can be irritants and make asthma symptoms worse.

**Colds and infections**

- Avoid people with colds or the flu. Washing your hands frequently can reduce chances of infection.
- Get rest, eat a balanced diet, and exercise regularly
- Talk to your doctor about flu shots

**Medications**

Some people with asthma are sensitive to aspirin and other anti-inflammatory drugs. In general, persons with asthma should avoid a class of drugs known as beta-blockers, often used for heart disease, blood pressure, and glaucoma. Do not take over-the-counter cold remedies, such as antihistamines and cough syrup, unless you speak to your doctor or pharmacist first.

**Exercise**

- Work out a medicine plan with your doctor that allows you to exercise without symptoms.
- Warm up before doing exercise and cool down afterward.

**Weather**

- Wear a scarf over your mouth and nose, or pull a turtleneck over your nose on windy or cold days.
- Dress warmly in the winter or on windy days.

**Identifying occupational asthma**

- Pay particular attention to times and locations where symptoms occur
- Consider exposure to irritants from industries located near your home or workplace
- Determine whether any of your hobbies involve asthma-causing chemicals
- Allergy skin tests or blood tests may be helpful

### **Nonallergenic cleaning agents**

The following can be safely used:

- **General household cleaners**
  - ▶ Ammonia (use plain ammonia)
  - ▶ Baking Soda is a good room, rug, or refrigerator deodorizer
  - ▶ White or Apple Cider Vinegar removes mold and mineral deposits, crayon marks
- **Furniture polish**
  - ▶ Beeswax
  - ▶ Mineral Oil
  - ▶ Lemon Oil
  - ▶ Olive Oil
  - ▶ Linseed Oil
  - ▶ Paste Wax
- Nonchlorine Bleaches are good household or laundry cleaners
- Club soda is a good spot remover
- Salt loosens burned-on food and is a good kitchen cleanser
- Soap used should be unscented or mild

Making these changes may take a little or a lot of effort on your part but will help keep asthma episodes from starting. An asthma trigger control plan is an important part of controlling asthma.

**If you would like more written information, please call the Library for Health Information at (614)293-3707. You can also make the request by e-mail: [health-info@osu.edu](mailto:health-info@osu.edu).**