

## Indoor Air Quality: Clear Your Home of Asthma Triggers

The quality of the indoor environment can greatly affect people with asthma. The presence of mold, dust mites, pet dander, cockroaches, and secondhand smoke in the home can trigger an asthma attack. Asthma symptoms may include difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, wheezing, tightness of the chest and coughing. To minimize asthma triggers in your home, take the following steps to improve the indoor environment.

**Cockroaches and Rodents:** The key is to prevent these pests from entering your home. Avoid using pesticides as these chemicals can also be toxic and aggravate asthma symptoms. Try these suggestions:

- Do not leave food or garbage out and clean up crumbs and spills right away.
- Try using poison bait for insects and mice.
- Fix plumbing leaks and other moisture problems.
- Use wastebaskets with lids and take the trash out often.

**Pets:** Pet dander, urine, and saliva can trigger asthma. The best way to protect yourself from exposure is to keep your home pet-free. If you already have a pet, you may consider finding it a new home. If you intend to keep your pet, try:

- Keeping pets in only one area of the home.
- Keeping animals out of the bedroom or sleeping areas at all times.
- Keeping pets off of fabric-covered furniture and carpet.
- Keeping pets outside and not allowing them into the house.

**Molds:** Mold spores grow in moist areas. The best way to control mold growth is to fix the moisture problem, then clean up the mold. Have someone without asthma do the repairs and cleaning. Breathing in mold spores that are released during cleaning can pose a serious health risk, so use caution. A dust mask or respirator may be necessary. To remove mold and avoid its future re-growth:

- Repair leaks and thoroughly dry the area.
- Wash mold off of hard surfaces. Scrub and disinfect.
- Replace absorbent materials that have mold. They cannot be effectively cleaned.
- Use exhaust fans and open windows when showering, cooking, or running the dishwasher.
- Vent the clothes dryer to the outside.
- Maintain low humidity indoors (between 35-55%).

**Secondhand Smoke:** Asthma can be triggered by smoke from burning cigarettes, pipes, cigars or smoke exhaled by smokers. The best way to control secondhand smoke is to not allow it in your home, and to avoid places where people are smoking.

**Dust Mites:** These microscopic creatures live in warm, humid places such as bedding, carpets, upholstered furniture, stuffed toys, and curtains. The following suggestions will help eliminate dust mite habitat in the home:

- Wash bedding in hot water.
- Use zippered mattress and pillow covers.
- Avoid clutter and knick-knacks that catch dust.
- Reduce or eliminate carpeting.
- Use a vacuum with a high-performance filter.



For more information please see the following websites:

<http://www.epa.gov/asthma/triggers.html>

<http://www.lungusa.org/site/pp.asp?c=dvLUK900E&b=35622>