

## *Greenwich Hospital*

### **How does the environment affect asthma?**

#### **PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET**

### **How does the environment affect asthma?**

Asthma cannot be cured but measures can be taken to keep the symptoms of asthma under control. One way to manage asthma is through environmental controls of asthma triggers.

Triggers are things that cause asthma symptoms. When you have asthma, your breathing tubes, or airways, become inflamed and clogged with mucus. Asthma triggers worsen this problem. There are many triggers in the environment that may make asthma worse.



Image Source: [www.e-healthy-homes.com](http://www.e-healthy-homes.com)

### **What triggers may be in the indoor environment?**

Common triggers in the home environment may include:

- Mold and mildew
- Pests such as roaches or mice
- Animal dander (dry skin that flakes off pets)
- Animal saliva or urine
- Feathers
- Perfumes and hair sprays
- Cleaning solutions
- Dust mites (microscopic insects that live on dust particles)
- Tobacco and/or wood smoke
- Rugs/carpeting

### **What triggers may be in the outdoor environment?**

Other triggers that exist outdoors may include:

- Pollen/flowers
- Grass and/or hay
- Car exhaust and other forms of smoke
- Chemical fumes
- Extreme weather temperatures
- Dirt/dust

## **How do I control indoor triggers?**

There are a number of environmental controls to manage indoor irritants:

- Regular changing of air filters in household heating and cooling systems.
- Only using cleaning solutions in well-ventilated areas. This may include opening the windows in bathrooms and kitchens when cleaning.
- Vacuuming and dusting weekly to keep the house free of dust and control dust mites, especially in bedrooms and playrooms.
- Washing sheets weekly in hot water and using dust-proof mattress and pillow covers to control dust mites.
- Getting rid of carpets which harbor dust mites and mold.
- Keeping pets out of the bedrooms.
- Not allowing anyone to smoke in the home or car.
- Avoiding the use of wood-burning stoves and conventional wood-burning fireplaces.
- Avoiding the use of perfumes and air fresheners with heavy perfume odors.
- Staying out of basements if there is mold or mildew in them.
- Repairing water leaks in plumbing that may be causing mold growth.

## **How do I control outdoor triggers?**

Outdoor triggers may also worsen asthma symptoms. During spring and summer months, stay indoors when the lawn is being mowed. For teenagers and/or adults with asthma, it is better not to do the lawn mowing if grass and hay are among your triggers.

Air quality during summer months may also be a trigger for some. Listen to weather reports and stay indoors in air conditioning when the air quality is poor.

During autumn months, the falling leaves may be a potential problem for asthmatics. If this is a trigger, playing in leaves and raking leaves should be avoided.

During the winter months, the cold air may be a trigger. Airways should be protected by covering the nose and mouth with a scarf. Also use care to choose scarves made out of materials that will not shed or trigger asthma.

Source: Nemour's Foundation at <http://kidshealth.org> Retrieved November 2002.

U. S. Environmental Protection Agency. *Clear yourself of asthma*. Retrieved November 2005 from <http://www.epa.gov>

*For more Patient Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at [www.greenhosp.org](http://www.greenhosp.org) and Click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education*