Way to Grow!
HEALTHY FACTS From Children's Hospital of The King's Daughters

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HOW TO AVOID ASTHMA TRIGGERS

Many things can trigger an asthma episode including:

- upper respiratory infections
- allergies to dust mites, pollens, animal dander, mold/mildew, or cockroaches
- exercise
- irritants such as cigarette and other forms of smoke, strong odors and perfumes, fumes from woodstoves or kerosene heaters, and air pollution
- weather changes

The following is a list of things you can do to limit your child's exposure to common triggers.

ALLERGIES:

DUST: Dust is the most common year round allergy. The allergy is caused by tiny insect-like creatures called dust mites. Dust mites are found in mattresses, carpets and upholstered furniture. They thrive in warm, humid conditions and feed on the shed scales of human skin. The best way to prevent allergy symptoms caused by dust mites is to limit your child's exposure. Be sure to pay special attention to the bedroom where your child spends much of his/her time.

Bed: Every bed in your child's room should have wooden or metal frames. Do not use a couch, sofa, or hide-a-bed. If your child sleeps in a bunk bed, he/she should sleep in the top bunk.

Mattress/box spring: Place the mattress and box spring in a zippered, dust-proof cover. Tape over the zipper with electrical or duct tape. If there are other beds in the room, place the mattress and box springs in dust-proof covers as well.

Pillows: Encase pillows in zippered, dust-proof covers. Pillows should be made of Dacron or other synthetic fiber. Do not use foam, feather, or "Down" pillows.

Bedding: Avoid wool or down blankets. Wash all bedding (sheets, pillowcases, blankets) in hot water. Cold water will not kill the dust mites. Older children who can safely use an electric blanket may use one. Dry all clothes and bedding in the dryer to avoid pollen sticking to them when on a clothesline.

Floor coverings: If possible, remove wall-to-wall carpeting. If not, vacuum the carpet frequently (at least twice a week). Only vacuum when your child is away and will not return to the room for several hours after you have finished. Substitute multi-layered vacuum bags for regular single layer bags. Small, washable cotton rugs may be used if washed often. Wood, tile, or vinyl flooring without a rug is best, and they should be mopped at least weekly.

Closet: Remove all stored toys, boxes, and other articles from the closet. The closet should contain only your child's clothing and should be as dust-free as the room. Keep all clothes in closets, never lying around the room.

Furnace (heating): Electric or gas heat is recommended. Do not use wood stoves or kerosene heaters. Change the air filters on the furnace every month. Cover all furnace outlets in the room with special filters or cover the outlets with ten thicknesses of cheesecloth or muslin. This will catch dust in the furnace air. Change the cheesecloth when it gets dusty underneath (about every two weeks).

Air conditioners: Window unit or central air-conditioning is ideal. Change or clean all filters every month. Electric fans or ceiling fans should not be used. Windows should be kept closed, especially in the summer.

Doors: Keep the bedroom closet door and bedroom door closed as much as possible.

Walls: Paint walls or use washable wallpaper. Avoid pennants, pictures, wreaths, flower arrangements or other dust catchers on the walls.

Window coverings: Avoid heavy curtains and Venetian/mini blinds. Use window shades instead. If curtains are used, they should be washed monthly in hot water.

Humidifier: Avoid the use of humidifiers, dust mites grow best in high humidity. Use a dehumidifier to keep humidity in the home less than 50%.

Furniture: Remove all upholstered (stuffed) furniture and replace upholstered furniture with wooden or plastic furniture. No open bookshelves--they are great dust catchers.

Sleeping and napping: Your child should nap or sleep only in his/her own bed, which has been made dust free. When your child travels or visits, he/she should take their non-allergic pillow with him/her.

Playing: Do not allow your child to jump on furniture or beds nor wrestle on carpeted floors. Your child's bedroom should not be used as a playroom. Avoid fabric toys or stuffed animals. If your child has stuffed animals they should be machine washable and washed in hot water or placed in the freezer overnight at least weekly. Store toys in a closed toy chest.

POLLENS: Pollens can be a problem in this area from February thru November each year. If your child is allergic to pollen, during pollen season it is important that you keep car/house windows closed and use the air conditioning.

ANIMAL DANDER: Pets that have fur or feathers often cause allergy troubles. If your child is allergic to animal dander (the "skin" of the animal), it is best not to have pets and not to visit homes where these types of pets are kept. If your child must have a pet, "hairless" pets such as fish, hermit crabs or snakes are okay.

MOLD/MILDEW: Mold and mildew grow in areas that are dark, humid and have poor ventilation.

Outdoors: Avoid damp, shady areas; remove fallen leaves; avoid cutting the grass.

Bathrooms and Kitchens: Always use the exhaust fans when cooking or bathing. If you do see mold/mildew, clean the area with cleansers made with bleach.

In the House: Use the air conditioner. Avoid using humidifiers, as mold/mildew can grow in the water tank. If you must use a humidifier, clean it daily with a bleach and water solution. Reduce indoor humidity to <50% - use a dehumidifier, if needed. Empty and clean the dehumidifier daily.

COCKROACHES: Some people are very allergic to the substance the cockroach leaves behind. Cockroaches are very common in warm climates and in homes of people living in the city. However, even in climates with much cooler temperatures, the use of central heat allows the cockroaches to live. To avoid exposure to cockroaches, it is best to use insect sprays (air out the house after spraying however) and roach traps.

EXERCISE:

Even though exercise is a common asthma trigger, your child should not limit his/her participation in sports/exercise. Exercise is good for your child's health and for his/her lungs. Some forms of exercise such as running long distances and playing basketball may be harder for your child to do. Activities such as swimming, golf, and karate are good choices for children with asthma. However, children with asthma should be able to participate in most physical activities. Always warm-up prior to exercise and cool down at the end of exercise. Using your reliever medicine 15-20 minutes before starting exercise can be very helpful. Talk with your child's doctor about exercise and asthma if this is a problem for your child.

IRRITANTS:

SMOKE: Do not allow family and friends to smoke anywhere inside the house. Do not allow smoking in the car at any time. Smoke is very irritating in an enclosed area and its odor may be trapped in the car's upholstery for a long period of time and continue to trigger symptoms. When eating out, always sit in non-smoking sections of restaurants. You should also have non-smoking child care providers.

STRONG ODORS/PERFUMES: Your child should avoid things that have a strong smell such as cleaning products, perfumes, hair spray, tar, fresh paint, gasoline, insect sprays, and room deodorizers.

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