

Asthma Triggers

Having an asthma attack feels like breathing through a small straw. Symptoms include coughing, wheezing, feeling short of breath, chest-tightness, and possible permanent scarring of the airways. Asthma triggers are anything that causes an individual's asthma to worsen. There are both allergic and non-allergic triggers.

Allergic asthma triggers include pollens, dust-mites, cockroaches (especially in large inner cities), mold, or indoor pets. It is estimated that at least 75% of asthmatic children have allergic triggers for their asthma. Dallas, Texas was recently identified as having the highest percentage of cockroach allergic asthmatic-children in the U.S.

Non-allergic asthmatic triggers may be extremely common as well. Asthmatic triggers not due to allergies include weather changes, hot or cold temperatures, strong smells, or second hand tobacco smoke. Exercise and strong emotions, such as laughing, crying, or anxiety, are well-known asthma triggers. Viral upper respiratory infections such as colds are found to trigger about 80% of asthma attacks where emergency care is sought.

Once asthma triggers are identified, it is necessary to minimize or avoid any contact with these triggers, if at all possible. An allergist specializes in identifying and testing for asthma triggers as well as treating both asthmatic and allergic disease. Asthma can be well controlled by avoiding triggers and following the treating physician's management plan.

Resources:

2002 NHLBI guidelines for treating asthma
www.nlm.nih.gov/guidelines/asthma/index.htm

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
www.aafa.org/display.cfm?id=8&cont=6

Allergy and Asthma Network/Mothers of Asthmatics
www.aanma.org/headquarters/

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology Patient and Consumer Resources
www.aaaai.org/patients/search_allergic_conditions.stm