Arresting Asthma

If you or someone you know suffers from asthma, avoiding these triggers can help reduce breathing trouble and asthma attacks:

1. Irritants. These triggers cause non-allergic asthma. Steer clear of secondhand smoke, wood smoke and chemicals in the air. Stay away from strong odors or sprays such as perfumes, cooking fumes (especially from frying), paints or varnishes. At work, watch exposure to fumes, gases and dust.

2. Upper respiratory illness. Try to avoid or quickly relieve cold and flu symptoms, which are primary triggers for non-allergic asthma.

3. Hay fever. Controlling hay fever — including avoidance of allergens such as pollen, dust mites, animal dander and mold — can help minimize allergic asthma.

4. Exercise. Strenuous physical activity can increase the likelihood of exercise-induced asthma. Check with your health care provider about customizing a fitness program you can safely follow.

5. Medications. Aspirin and similar pain relievers, such as ibuprofen, may trigger asthma attacks in adults. Beta-blockers, which are used to treat heart disease, high blood pressure or migraine headaches, may also have this effect.

6. Foods. Milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, soy, wheat, fish and shellfish may trigger attacks in some people.

Special medications for asthma include bronchodilators, which open up air passages. A newer drug, omalizumab, is available for patients with moderate to severe persistent allergic asthma that hasn't responded to other remedies.

If you even think it's asthma ...

Studies suggest asthma may cause permanent damage to the lungs when untreated or improperly treated. So don't wait if you suspect asthma. A health care provider can make a firm diagnosis and help you manage symptoms.

More Allergy Tips

- **Keep your houseplants free of dust.** Research shows that allergens that collect on dusty leaves may become airborne — most commonly from ficus and yucca, as well as ivy and palm trees.
- **Remember that antihistamines prevent** the release of histamine, so they work best if taken before exposure to triggers. Read medication labels and follow all directions.
- **Seek a proper diagnosis** if you suspect food allergy. Many cases of food allergy are actually food intolerances, such as lactose intolerance, which are not triggered by allergens.
- **To avoid insect stings,** don't wear bright-colored clothes or floral patterns and avoid scented cosmetics, hair products or perfume. Don't drink soda or other sweetened drinks outside.
- **Remember that anaphylaxis can be fatal,** so call 9-1-1 right away if the following symptoms appear: sudden drop in blood pressure; swelling of face, tongue or throat; difficulty breathing; wheezing or chest tightness. An epinephrine shot can ease the reaction while seeking emergency treatment. Ask your provider if you need to buy one and keep it on hand.
- **If you've been prescribed** self-injectable epinephrine for insect stings or food allergies, carry it with you at all times.
- **If you smoke, quit.** Smokers are at increased risk for occupational asthma, which is triggered by workplace exposure to irritants such as fumes, gases and dust.
- **Learn to manage stress.** Emotional stress may reduce your resistance to allergens.

Remember: Most allergic diseases are highly treatable and, with the right lifestyle changes, you can minimize the misery and even live allergy-free. You can be breathing and feeling better soon.

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UNDERSTANDING ALLERGIES

HOW TO PREVENT THEM, HOW TO GET RELIEF

SAMPLE

The Basics of Allergy

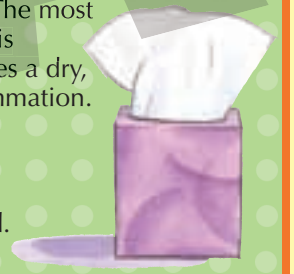
Tens of millions of people suffer from allergies because their immune systems are overly sensitive to pollen, dust mites, foods or other substances called allergens. Normally harmless, these substances enter the body and push the immune system into overdrive. This triggers an allergic reaction, which involves the release of irritating chemicals such as histamine that cause itching, swelling and tearing.

The good news is that you don't have to suffer needlessly. A combination of awareness, prevention and treatment can help you enjoy life more fully.

How Allergies Can Make You Sick

These three common conditions are related to allergies:

1. **Hay fever.** Also known as allergic rhinitis, hay fever is an inflammation of the lining of the nose triggered by pollen and other substances.
2. **Asthma.** This chronic respiratory disorder is characterized by difficult breathing when the airway becomes constricted and inflamed, often in response to allergens such as pollen, mold, dander, dust mites and cockroach droppings.
3. **Dermatitis.** Also called eczema, this is a chronic but not dangerous skin disorder. The most common type, atopic dermatitis, is triggered by allergies and produces a dry, itchy, rash-like redness and inflammation.



Allergy or Cold?

Hay fever is often mistaken for a cold. **Here's how to tell which is which:**

Symptoms	Hay Fever	Cold
Nasal discharge	Thin; watery and clear	Thick; yellow to green
Itching	In ears, eyes, nose or throat	Rare
Sneezing	Severe, prolonged spells	Only occasional
Symptom duration	Continue or occur most of the year	Last 7–10 days

Taking Control: Allergy Prevention

Many allergens enter the body through inhaling or touching, so reducing your exposure is important. **Take these steps:**

Clean house. Hay fever is triggered by airborne allergens such as pollen, dust, animal dander and mold spores. A thorough house cleaning, including air-conditioning vents, can help reduce allergens that have gathered indoors. Scrub moldy surfaces and fix any water leaks. If you're allergic, enlist a cleaning service or help from other household members.

Minimize your exposure. Avoid outdoor activity when pollen counts are highest, usually from early to late morning and on hot, windy days when dust and pollen are blowing around.

Close windows. Keep them shut in your home or car when pollen counts are highest; use air conditioning and a dehumidifier to reduce indoor humidity.

Launder properly. Wash bedding weekly in water that is hotter than 130˚F. Dry clothes in a dryer, not outside.

Practice pet control. Try to keep pets off furniture and out of your bedroom.

Wash and bathe. Frequent hand washing keeps hands free of allergens such as pollen and dust. Showering and shampooing before bed avoids transferring allergens to your bedding.

What About Food Allergies?

Food allergy is not common in adults, but it can be serious in some people. Symptoms may include itching in the mouth, vomiting, diarrhea or stomach pain, hives, eczema or asthma.

Eight foods account for most food allergies: peanuts, tree nuts (e.g., walnuts, cashews), fish, shellfish, milk, eggs, wheat and soy. Peanuts in particular can cause a severe allergic reaction, called anaphylaxis. Strict avoidance is the only proven remedy for food allergy. **The good news:** Food manufacturers are required to list possible allergy-inducing ingredients on labels, so read food packages carefully.

Allergy Shots, a Long-term Solution

Also known as immunotherapy, allergy shots are intended to help the body develop immunity to the allergens involved in hay fever, asthma and insect stings. The immunity building can take months to years. Consider this option if you can't avoid triggers or if medications don't bring relief.

Allergy shots may reduce or eliminate allergy symptoms or have little effect on them, depending on the individual. If you don't feel better after a year of maintenance shots, discuss other treatments with your health care provider.

Taking Control: Allergy Management

Your health care provider or an allergy specialist can recommend or prescribe medications to help control allergies. **Options include:**

- **Non-sedating oral antihistamines,** used to treat hay fever. These are available over the counter and by prescription. Avoid older antihistamines if you need to stay alert, since they may make you drowsy.
- **Decongestants,** available in pills, liquid or nasal spray, to relieve stuffy nose. A combination antihistamine-decongestant may be more effective than either alone.
- **Corticosteroids,** anti-inflammatory medications used to treat many allergic disorders, including hay fever, asthma and eczema. Pills and inhalers can treat respiratory disorders such as asthma; topical creams or ointments can relieve skin allergies.
- **Mast cell stabilizers,** non-steroidal medications, such as cromolyn and nedocromil, that prevent release of inflammatory chemicals for both hay fever and asthma.

Remember: Prescription or nonprescription, always follow medication directions to the letter.

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