Asthma-friendly home

Summary

- Most houses contain asthma triggers that could make symptoms worse in people with asthma.
- Eliminating dust is an effective way to cut back on many allergens.
- An asthma-friendly home is a smoke-free zone.
- Making changes to your home’s ventilation, heating and cooling can improve the air quality for people with asthma.

Most people with asthma find their symptoms get worse when they are exposed to certain triggers. Some of these triggers can be found in and around the average home. There are many ways in which you can transform your home into an asthma-friendly environment.

Asthma triggers in the home

Some of the more common household asthma triggers include:

- dust mites – which love warm, moist conditions and thrive in bedding and carpets. Their droppings cause the allergic reaction
- moulds – which need moist environments with poor ventilation
- pollens – from trees, plants and grasses
- pets – because of their fur, skin or scales (called ‘dander’)
- other triggers – including cold dry air, smoke, certain foods, chemicals and perfumes.

Improve air quality for an asthma-friendly home

To improve the air quality in your home and make it asthma-friendly, make your home a smoke-free zone, and pay attention to ventilation, heating and cooling. Ideally, the air in your home should be fresh and not too humid.

Things to consider for home heating systems:

- Wood fire heaters produce high levels of smoke and particulate matter (PM2.5) emissions which can be a trigger for asthma.
- Un-flued gas heating can release chemicals such as nitrogen dioxide which can be a trigger for asthma.
- Fan-forced ducted heating can collect dust and, if not cleaned, will circulate dust around the house which can be a trigger for asthma.
- Electric heating methods (such as panel heaters, radiant heaters and hydronic heaters) may be better forms of heating for people with asthma as they don’t emit or circulate smoke, gases or dust.

Things to consider for home cooling systems:

- If you have overhead fans, make sure you clean the dust off (or get someone to do this for you) before you turn them on, to prevent dust spreading.
- Evaporative and refrigerated air conditioners can increase humidity levels, which may increase the risk of mould or house dust mites, which can be a trigger for asthma.
- Reverse cycle air conditioners may assist in lowering indoor humidity.
- Ensure the filters of your air conditioning system are regularly maintained and cleaned.
- There is not yet sufficient evidence to suggest the use of one type of air conditioning is better than another for people with asthma.

Asthma and dust in the home
Dust contains many allergen particles. Some suggestions on how to cut down on the amount of dust in your home include:

- Avoid carpets. If choosing carpet, select short pile or loop carpet, nylon and solution dyed.
- Vacuum or mop floors regularly (preferably when the person with asthma is not in the vicinity).
- Hot wash all bedding above 60 °C every two weeks and dry in direct sunlight.
- Air blankets regularly in direct sunlight.
- Use a damp cloth to dust furniture instead of dry dusting.
- Replace curtains with vertical or roller blinds, which are easier to clean.
- Put doors on any open shelving units.
- Regularly clean ceiling fans and air conditioning vents.
- Vacuum and clean furniture frequently.

**Pets and an asthma-friendly home**

If you don’t want to get rid of any furry pets, there are ways of minimising their impact, including:

- Have your pets live outside.
- Keep pets out of the bedrooms.
- Brush or groom pets outside.
- Regularly bath furred animals, unless this puts the animal’s health at risk.
- Clean out cages or litter boxes regularly.
- Regularly clean or vacuum floors, curtains and upholstery (or have someone who is not allergic to the animals do so).
- Choose non-shedding or low-shedding pets.

**Grow a ‘low-allergen’ garden**

Ways of reducing the amount of allergens in your garden include:

- Replace lawn with bricked or paved areas.
- Choose Australian native plants and brightly coloured, large flowering plants that are pollinated by birds or insects rather than wind, as they don’t release pollen into the air.
- Avoid plants with strong fragrances or odour (such as jasmines), especially planted next to entrances, entrances or windows. (Roses are an exception.)
- Avoid rye grass.
- Choose native or slow-growing, low or no pollen grass that does not require frequent mowing.
- Use inorganic mulches such as pebbles or gravel to reduce weeds and mould spores.
- Weed the garden often to avoid weeds flowering or seeding.
- Avoid compost heaps.
- Avoid gardening on windy days when pollen may be airborne.

**Where to get help**

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- **Pharmacist**
- **Asthma Australia** Tel. 1800 ASTHMA (278 462)
- The **Royal Children’s Hospital** has produced a number of videos to help you better understand and manage your child’s asthma

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