Environmental Asthma Triggers

We spoke to asthma patients and health professionals (such as physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, pharmacists and health educators) about important messages for managing asthma. This brochure captures some of the ideas they shared, and is intended for patients and health professionals to use together to improve their partnership in managing asthma.

Working Together

How do I manage my asthma triggers?

I have a lot going on. I can try to keep a diary, but I don’t see doing it for very long.

The way I finally figured out what my triggers were was through trial and error.

My doctor talked to me about triggers that affect many asthma patients, asked me if I smoke or live with people who smoke, and also asked me about allergies and pets.

I’m not going to give away our cat; he’s a member of the family.

Environmental Asthma Triggers

What Asthma Patients & Parents Said

Doctors and health professionals should talk about asthma triggers as a general concern, as well as those that are specific to each individual patient.

Log sheets or diaries used along with a peak flow meter can monitor how triggers and medications affect asthma.

Asthma Resources

New York State Department of Health
(800) 458-1158
www.nyhealth.gov

Allergy and Asthma Network/Mothers of Asthmatics, Inc.
(800) 878-4403
www.aamna.org

Allergy and Asthma Foundation of America
(800) 7-ASTHMA
www.aafa.org

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology
(800) 822-2762
www.aaaai.org

American Academy of Pediatrics
(800) 433-9016
www.aap.org

American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology
(800) 842-7777
www.acai.org

American Lung Association
(800) LUNG-USA
www.lungusa.org/site/pp.asp?c=dvLUK9O0E&b=22581

Institute For Health Care Communication, Inc.
(800) 800-5907
www.healthcare.com

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
(212) 637-3660
www.epa.gov

National Jewish Medical and Research Center
(800) 222-LUNG
www.asthma.nationaljewish.org/disease-info/diseases/asthma/living/environ/index.aspx

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
(301) 496-5717
www.niaid.nih.gov

We learned people may have

Open for ideas for discussing

environmental triggers together

different views about asthma

What Doctors & Other Health Professionals Said

Knowing and managing triggers is a key part of asthma management.

There are many ways to help a person discover his or her own personal triggers.

Doctors and health professionals should talk about asthma triggers as a general concern, as well as those that are specific to each individual patient.

Once a person knows his or her triggers, it is possible to develop strategies to avoid them. Recommendations have to be practical.

Get a JUMP on asthma

4955
New York State Department of Health
8/06

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Once a person knows his or her triggers, it is possible to develop strategies to avoid them. Recommendations have to be practical.
Focus on the triggers or factors in the environment that bring on asthma symptoms. Triggers are different for each person. They can be indoors or outdoors. “Examples of Triggers Reported by Asthma Patients” lists many kinds of triggers that affect people with asthma.

Health professionals and patients should discuss the possible triggers of everyday life – at home, work, school, etc. Allergy testing may be helpful. Make note of activities and locations when asthma symptoms get worse.

Patients can use a log, diary or notebook to track peak flow scores, medications and asthma triggers for about a month or until their asthma is under control. Work out a written asthma action plan that will explain what to do when symptoms get worse. (See “What is an Asthma Action Plan?” in the “Managing Asthma” brochure of this series for more details.)

Explore both general and person-specific triggers. Some common triggers include dust mites and mold, pets, strong odors, cockroaches, cigarette and cigar smoke, viral or sinus infections, emotions, weather changes, pollution, and exercise. (See “Examples of Triggers” for a more extensive list.)

It may be possible to create a “safe haven” or space where triggers are not present. For example, a person whose cat triggers their asthma can keep the cat out of the room where they sleep.

Examples of Triggers Reported by Asthma Patients

**Allergens**
- Pollen from trees, grasses, hay, ragweed, mold
- Animals such as cats, dogs, rabbits, hamsters, gerbils, birds, rats, mice
- Dust mites
- Insects such as cockroaches
- Sensitivity to sulfites, food preservatives, aspirin, or food dyes
- Food such as nuts, chocolate, eggs, orange juice, fish, milk, peanut butter

**Foods**
- My asthma triggers ...

**Weather**
- Cold air
- Weather changes
- Humidity

**Exercise**
- Especially in cold weather

**Nighttime**
- Lying down
- Accumulating mucus

**Emotions**
- Fear
- Anger
- Frustration
- Laughing or crying
- Depression
- Stress

**On The Job**
- Wood products
- Metals/metal fumes
- Cotton, flax, hemp
- Mold on or in decaying hay; water damaged, or badly cleaned parts of buildings
- Chemicals in paints, cleaning products
- Dust from wood, flour, latex gloves
- Industrial chemicals

**Around The House/School**
- Vapors from cleaning products, paint, paint thinner, liquid chlorine bleach
- Sprays from furniture polish, starch, cleaners, room deodorizers
- Spray deodorants, perfumes, hair sprays, talcum powder, scented cosmetics
- Vapors from furnishings (carpeting, cabinets)
- Pesticide sprays
- Incense and scented candles
- Chalk dust