

Breathe Easy is dedicated to providing helpful information to those with breathing difficulties

Avoid Airway Irritants

Exposure to irritants is known to be the main cause of many lung diseases including COPD, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, and asthma. The cause of most COPD is chronic exposure to cigarette smoke. Unfortunately you cannot turn back the clock and remove years of breathing irritants, but you can protect yourself from irritants now to improve your breathing.

Indoor Pollution – There are a number of indoor irritants that can make your breathing worse. One of the worst for your breathing is tobacco smoke. If you are a smoker, you need to quit. If you are not a smoker but have friends or family members that do, kindly ask them to not smoke around you. Let them know your physician has asked you to avoid all smoke for your health.

Other indoor air pollution may include anything with a strong odor or fumes including household cleaners, perfumes, air fresheners, paints, pet odors, and even cooking odors. In general, it is better to avoid as many aerosol sprays and heavy perfumes as possible. Look for options to aerosols such as using roll-on antiperspirant rather than a spray.

If a particular irritant can't be eliminated, look for a way to increase ventilation to decrease it. For example, if cooking odors bother you but you're the cook, check on getting a ventilation fan over your stove with a powerful fan and an outside vent.

Think ahead when traveling outside your home to a friend's house or public places. If going out to

Air Quality Indicator (AQI) Legend	
	Good - No health impacts are expected when air quality is in this range.
	Moderate - Unusually sensitive people should consider limiting prolonged outdoor exertion
	Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups - Active children and adults, and people with respiratory disease, such as asthma, should limit prolonged outdoor exertion.
	Unhealthy - Active children and adults, and people with respiratory disease, such as asthma, should avoid prolonged outdoor exertion; everyone else, especially children, should limit prolonged outdoor exertion.
	Very Unhealthy - Active children and adults, and people with respiratory disease, such as asthma, should avoid outdoor exertion; everyone else, especially children, should limit outdoor exertion.
Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.	

dinner with friends and heavy perfumes bother you, remind your friends or simply take your own car and meet them. At the restaurant, you may ask for outdoor seating if available.

Outdoor Pollution – Although outdoor pollution is typically less of a problem, outdoor air quality can be an issue in some areas. If you live in a metropolitan area, smog can be a problem for you. In the country, living near a livestock confinement may cause you problems.

Before going outside, check the Air Quality Index or AQI for your area. This color-coded index was created by the Environmental Protection Agency and is calculated from levels of five pollutants including ground-level ozone, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen

dioxide. The Weather Channel provides regular reports on air quality, allergies, pollen, and even cold and flu outbreaks. Their information is also available at www.weather.com, by clicking on their 'Stay Healthy' menu tab.

Allergens – While indoor or outdoor pollution may irritate your breathing, allergens are substances that trigger an allergic reaction. Symptoms may include itchy or watery eyes, a stuffy or runny nose, headaches, and in some people breathing difficulties including wheezing, coughing, tight chest, and difficulty breathing.

Common indoor allergens include pet dander or pet urine, mold, cockroach droppings, and dust mites. The most common outdoor allergen is pollen.

If you have allergies, try to identify which allergens trigger your problems and then do your best to eliminate or avoid them. Keeping a diary of exposures and symptoms can be helpful. There are also tests that your doctor can administer to identify your allergies.

Infections – Respiratory infections cause irritation and swelling of the airways and studies have shown it may take weeks for your airways to fully recover. Avoid infections by staying active, eating well, drinking lots of fluids, and avoiding people with an infection. Every fall, you should take a flu shot and also discuss with your doctor whether a pneumonia shot would benefit you. The pneumonia shot or 'pneumovax' as it is commonly called is taken every five years.



While these shots are not 100% effective at preventing all flu and pneumonia, they do greatly reduce your risk of contracting the most common forms of influenza and pneumonia.

If you do get an infection, see your doctor right away for treatment. The longer you wait to seek treatment, the longer it will take for you to fully recover.

Weather – Exposure to very cold air causes breathing to worsen. Likewise, exposure to hot and humid air can also cause breathing difficulties in others. If you have these problems, try to plan your outings at a time of day that is more comfortable for you. Also, covering your mouth with a scarf or mask may help heat cold air before it hits your airway.

Emotions – Even strong emotions can affect breathing. Crying or laughing can dry and irritate during quick, deep breaths. Anxiety during difficult breathing can also make shortness of breath worse. When experiencing these problems, do your best to relax and take a few slow, deep breaths.

While there are many things that can irritate your airway, you can take action to avoid or eliminate most if not all of these irritants. Take control of your breathing by taking the steps necessary to do so. With a little bit of planning and prevention, you will find that it is worth it when you **Breathe Easy**.

Allergy Facts

- 50 million Americans suffer from allergies (1 in 5 Americans)
- Allergy is the 5th leading chronic disease in the U.S. and the 3rd among children under 18
- Approximately 10 million people are allergic to cat dander, the most common pet allergy.
- The most common indoor/outdoor allergy triggers are: tree, grass and weed pollen; mold spores; dust mite and cockroach allergen; and cat, dog, and rodent dander.

Source: Asthma and Allergy Foundation www.aafa.org