

Asthma friendly environments – Your home

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. An important part of effective asthma management includes avoiding exposure to your particular triggers. There are many ways in which you can transform your home into an asthma-friendly environment.

Common household triggers

Some of the more common household triggers include:

- Dust mites - these tiny creatures love warm, moist conditions and thrive in bedding and carpets.
- Pollens
- from trees, plants and grasses
- Moulds - need moist environments with poor ventilation
- Pets - because of their fur, skin or scales (called animal 'dander')
- Other triggers - including cold dry air, smoke, certain foods, chemicals and perfumes.

Improve air quality

Make your home a smoke free zone. You should also pay attention to ventilation, heating and cooling. Ideally, the air in your home should be fresh and not too humid.

Good ventilation

- Install extractor fans with external vents in the kitchen, bathroom and laundry, vented externally rather than into the roof space
- Use an efficient externally vented range hood over your stove top to remove steam and cooking smells that can irritate people with asthma
- Have fixed air vents in all rooms to ensure air circulation
- Use electric cooking appliances as they do not produce gaseous fumes, allow minimal heat loss and are easy and safe to use.

Heating and cooling

- Choose radiant heating which doesn't collect or circulate dust
- Avoid open fires because wood smoke can be a trigger
- Avoid fan-forced ducted heating because it circulates dust
- Choose refrigerated reverse cycle systems because they take the moisture out of the air and adjust if cold dry air is a trigger
- Avoid evaporative cooling systems because they humidify the air
- Use foil or polyester insulation
- Avoid unflued gas heaters because they produce indoor air pollutants as a result of combustion, including nitrogen dioxide and carbon monoxide. They also produce water vapour that can increase the growth of moulds and dust mites.

Cut down on dust

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

- Remove the carpet or, if that isn't possible, vacuum regularly
- Vacuum any fabric upholstered furniture regularly
- Buy a vacuum with a good filter system
- 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

Reduce your dust mite population

Dust mites tend to thrive in beds and carpets. Some suggestions include:

- Avoid carpets – if carpeted go for short pile/loop carpet
- Optimal flooring options include ceramic tiles, sealed wood, cork or slate, which are all easy to clean
- Vacuum or mop floors daily (preferably when the person with asthma is not in the vicinity)
- Use mattress, doona and pillow protectors and vacuum the mattress every week
- Hot wash all bedding above 60°C every two weeks and dry in direct sunlight
- Cut down on fluffy toys or put them in the freezer for 24 hours once a week
- Air blankets weekly in direct sunlight

Minimising the impact of pets

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
- Wash the pets every week
- Clean out cages or litter boxes regularly
- Choose non-shedding or low shedding pets

Grow a 'low allergen' garden

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

- Weed regularly
- Replace lawn with bricked or paved areas
- Avoid rye grass
- Choose plants that are pollinated by birds or insects instead of plants that release seeds into the air
- Replace mulch with pebbles or gravel

Things to remember

- Most houses contain triggers which could make symptoms worse in people with asthma
- Eliminating dust is an effective way to cut back on many allergens
- Remove any suspect plants from your garden

Where to get help

- Your doctor, pharmacist or health professional

Our commitment to you

The Asthma Foundation of Victoria is committed to contributing to a healthier, safer and resilient community. We do this by providing learning opportunities that aim to build confidence and capability to prevent, identify and manage asthma and linked conditions including medical emergencies for self and others.

For any further support, please contact us via the details at the footer of this information sheet.