



Asthma Outlook

STAYING HEALTHY

LIVING WELL

SPRING 2009

When Asthma Happens on the Job

Occupational asthma is caused by breathing fumes, gases, or dust on the job. The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology notes that your asthma might be job-related if your symptoms worsen during the work week and improve on the weekend. For some people, substances in the workplace can: **Irritate the airways.** This may lead to immediate wheezing and other symptoms. This

is particularly common in people who already have asthma or another lung disorder. **Trigger allergic reactions.** These reactions can cause asthma to develop gradually over time. Veterinarians and fishermen may become allergic to animal proteins and have asthma symptoms. **Have druglike effects.** Some inhaled substances can lead to the buildup of naturally occur-

ring chemicals in the body. These chemicals, in turn, lead to asthma symptoms. For example, the insecticides used by some farmers can cause the buildup of a body chemical that narrows the airways.

Preventive medication may be used to treat occupational asthma. Changes in your job may help, too. Ask your doctor what would work best for you.



Allergy Shots and Asthma Control

Allergic asthma is the most common form of asthma. It's triggered by allergens—or substances that cause an allergic reaction. In some cases, you may not know exactly what you're sensitive to. If your asthma symptoms can be linked to specific allergens, and if they are things you can't avoid, allergy shots may be an option.

All About Allergy Shots

The formal name for allergy shots is immunotherapy. This treatment is aimed at decreasing your sensitivity to a certain substance. The shots, which contain small amounts of an allergen, are given on a regular schedule for months to years. As time goes on, your body gets used to the allergen. Eventually, it no longer overreacts to the substance.

According to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, allergy shots are usually given in two phases:

Buildup. During this phase, the amount of allergen in the shots is slowly increased until you reach the dose that works best for you. Shots usually are given once or twice a week, although sometimes they're given more often. The phase typically lasts for three to six months.

Maintenance. This phase begins once you've built up to the effective dose of allergen. At this point, shots may be given only once or twice a month. The phase often continues for three to five years.

Are Allergy Shots for You?

Not all allergies can be treated with allergy shots. For example, the best treatment for a food allergy is to strictly avoid the food. Your doctor can help you decide whether allergy shots are a good choice for you. Some factors to consider include:

- How severe your symptoms are
- How well medication controls them
- Whether you can avoid the allergen
- Whether you can make the time commitment for a lengthy series of shots

Allergy shots can't cure asthma. However, they may lessen your symptoms. You will most likely notice gradual improvement throughout the treatment period. The benefits may help you breathe easier long after you've had your final shot. Talk with your doctor to see if the shots can offer you some relief.



The Connection Between Respiratory Infections and Asthma

Having a cold or the flu is bad enough. When you also have asthma, these infections can trigger your symptoms or make them worse.



The American Academy of Family Physicians explains that respiratory infections are illnesses that affect the organs used for breathing. Such infections irritate the airways, and the added irritation may be all it takes to set off an asthma flare-up. The problem affects people of all ages. It is a particular concern for young children with asthma. In fact, viral infections, such as colds or the flu, are thought to cause between 80 and 85 percent of asthma episodes in kids.

You can't completely avoid such infections, but you may be able to cut down on how many you catch. Here's how.

Influenza

The flu (influenza) is caused by influenza viruses. When people with asthma get the flu, they're at high risk for serious complications. These complications can include pneumonia, hospitalization, or even death. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to significantly reduce your risk.

Getting a flu shot is the best way to protect yourself. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends annual flu shots for everyone with asthma, regardless of age. The American Lung Association estimates that fewer than 10 percent

of people with asthma follow this advice. If that fraction were raised to half of people with asthma, experts say 41 percent of asthma attacks triggered by the flu could be prevented.

At times, your doctor might also prescribe an antiviral drug to help prevent the flu. If you already have the flu, this type of medication may make your illness milder and help you feel better faster. These medications often need to be used early on during a bout of the flu. It may also help ward off the most serious complications.

Common Cold

Colds are infections of the nose and throat that can be caused by more than 200 different viruses. For most people, colds are a minor annoyance. However, for people with asthma, an ordinary cold may give rise to a serious asthma attack. When researchers have studied people with asthma during flare-ups, they've found high rates of infection with common types of cold viruses.

Adults catch two to four colds a year on average. For young children, the average is six to eight colds a year. You might not be able to eliminate all colds. However, practicing good health habits may help reduce the number of colds you get. These same

MAKE CHANGE

a Family Affair

When you're making a lifestyle change, some of your best help may also be closest at hand: your family. Like you, family members have a big stake in your health. And they know you inside and out. According to the American Psychological Association, often your family members can provide invaluable help and encouragement. Below are examples of ways your family can help you reach your goals.

GOAL: Quitting smoking. Ask family members who are smokers not to smoke around you or leave cigarettes lying around.

GOAL: Exercising more. Take your activity outdoors. For families with children, rediscover the joy of exercise by biking, jogging, and playing basketball or soccer.

GOAL: Eating better. Make a pact with your partner. Agree not to keep high-fat, high-sugar snack foods around the house.

GOAL: Losing weight. Take a walk after dinner instead of watching TV. If no one else wants to join you, bring along a four-legged family member.



steps also help prevent other infections, including the flu:

Wash your hands often. Lather up with soap and water for 15 to 20 seconds. That's about the time it takes to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice. If no water is available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Clean surfaces such as telephones and stair railings with a virus-killing disinfectant. Cold viruses can live for up to three hours on these types of surfaces.

Infection Protection

Here are more steps to help keep you healthy:

Limit close contact with people who are sick. Then return the favor by keeping your distance when you have a cold or the flu.

Keep your hands away from your face.

Any germs on your hands can easily enter your body through your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then toss the tissue and wash your hands thoroughly.

Safeguard your overall health. Eat wisely, exercise regularly, drink enough fluids, manage stress, and get plenty of sleep.





Dust mites. Microscopic bugs that are found in almost every home. They are a common allergy trigger.

Immunotherapy. A series of shots containing small amounts of an allergy-causing substance. The goal is to gradually build up the body's tolerance for the substance, which decreases allergy symptoms.

Leptin. A hormone made by body fat. It helps regulate eating behavior and promotes inflammation.

Occupational asthma. A lung disorder caused by breathing fumes, gases, or dust in the workplace.

Respiratory infection. An illness that affects the organs used for breathing. Viral respiratory infections, such as colds and the flu, can trigger or worsen asthma.

Symptom diary. A daily log in which people with asthma record their symptoms. For example, they might note any wheezing, coughing, activity limitations, or sleeping problems.

Write Down Your Symptoms

When you need a reminder to pick up bread and milk at the supermarket, you write it down. The same holds true when you need to remember the asthma symptoms you have from day to day.

A symptom diary helps you keep track of daily changes in your symptoms. That way, you and your doctor can look for trends and adjust your treatment as needed. It's a critical role you can play in your own health care.

Dear Diary

Your doctor sees you at your periodic appointments. You're the one who lives with your asthma day in and day out. By recording your symptoms and sharing this information, you help your doctor assess how well your treatment is working. You also help identify triggers that set off your symptoms. In the long run, this type of information can help you get and keep your asthma under good control.

These are some things you might want to write down each day in your diary:

Wheezing. Rate it as none (0), a little (1), a medium amount (2), or a lot (3).

Coughing. Rate it as none (0), occasional (1), frequent (2), or constant (3).

Activity. Rate it as normal (0), can run a short distance (1), can walk but not run (2), or have to miss school or work or stay indoors.

Sleep. Rate it as fine (0), good with a slight wheeze or cough (1), awakened two or three times (2), or awake most of the night (3).

Triggers. Note what you were doing when symptoms started or got worse.

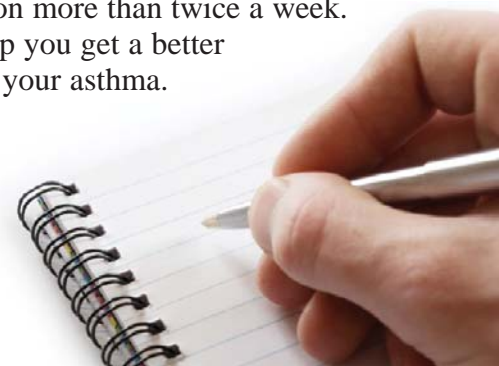
Medications. Note which quick-relief and long-term-control medications you take.

Peak flow. Record your peak-flow reading every time you check it.

The Write Stuff

A symptom diary may be useful for anyone with asthma. It can be especially helpful when you're trying a new treatment and want to see how well it works. It can also help when you need to figure out which things in your environment are making your symptoms worse.

In addition, you might be asked to keep a symptom diary if your asthma is not under good control. Signs of uncontrolled asthma include having symptoms that interfere with your normal activities or needing your quick-relief medication more than twice a week. Writing down your symptoms can help you get a better handle on them—and a better grip on your asthma.





Do You Know Your Triggers?

Triggers are things that make your asthma worse when you're around them. Knowing what they are is important so that you can limit your contact with them. This checklist can help you figure out what your triggers are. Ask your parents for help if you need to make changes to avoid certain triggers!

Does This Make Your Asthma Act Up?	Yes	What It Might Mean if You Checked "Yes"	What You Can Do
<p>Having a cold?</p> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>A cold might be bothering your nose, throat, lungs, or sinuses. That can trigger asthma.</p>	<p>Wash your hands often. Stay away from other people with colds.</p>
<p>Sports that make you run a lot or cold-weather activities?</p> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Exercise might be setting off your asthma. The problem may be worse if you breathe through your mouth or exercise in cold air.</p>	<p>Take your medicine. Also, ask your doctor if taking rescue medications before activity could help. Wear a scarf over your mouth and nose in cold, dry weather.</p>
<p>Being around dogs or cats?</p> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>You might be allergic to a substance in the skin flakes, saliva, or urine of furry animals.</p>	<p>Keep the animal out of your bedroom. Consider a pet without fur or feathers, such as a turtle or fish.</p>
<p>Certain times of the year?</p> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>You might be allergic to pollen. These tiny plant particles are carried on the breeze. You may be bothered in spring, summer, or fall, depending on which plants you're allergic to.</p>	<p>Keep windows closed at night during pollen season. Roll up car windows. Stay inside more when pollen counts are high and on windy and humid days.</p>
<p>Being around dust?</p> 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>You might be allergic to the droppings of dust mites. These teeny creatures thrive in dust.</p>	<p>Wear a dust mask when doing something that kicks up lots of dust. Ask if you need special allergy-proof covers for your mattress and pillows.</p>

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