

FIGURE 3–15. HOW TO CONTROL THINGS THAT MAKE YOUR ASTHMA WORSE

You can help prevent asthma episodes by staying away from things that make your asthma worse. This guide suggests many ways to help you do this.

You need to find out what makes your asthma worse. Some things that make asthma worse for some people are not a problem for others. You do not need to do all of the things listed in this guide.

Look at the things listed in dark print below. Put a check next to the ones that you know make your asthma worse, particularly if you are allergic to the things. Then, decide with your doctor what steps you will take. Start with the things in your *bedroom* that bother your asthma. Try something simple first.

Tobacco Smoke

- If you smoke, ask your doctor for ways to help you quit. Ask family members to quit smoking, too.
- Do not allow smoking in your home, car, or around you.
- Be sure no one smokes at a child's daycare center or school.

Dust Mites

Many people who have asthma are allergic to dust mites. Dust mites are like tiny "bugs" you cannot see that live in cloth or carpet.

Things that will help the most:

- Encase your mattress in a special dust mite-proof cover.*
- Encase your pillow in a special dust mite-proof cover* or wash the pillow each week in hot water. Water must be hotter than 130 °F to kill the mites. Cooler water used with detergent and bleach can also be effective.
- Wash the sheets and blankets on your bed each week in hot water.

Other things that can help:

- Reduce indoor humidity to or below 60 percent; ideally 30–50 percent. Dehumidifiers or central air conditioners can do this.
- Try not to sleep or lie on cloth-covered cushions or furniture.
- Remove carpets from your bedroom and those laid on concrete, if you can.
- Keep stuffed toys out of the bed, or wash the toys weekly in hot water or in cooler water with detergent and bleach. Placing toys weekly in a dryer or freezer may help. Prolonged exposure to dry heat or freezing can kill mites but does not remove allergen.

***To find out where to get products mentioned in this guide, call:**

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
(800–727–8462)

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology
(800–822–2762)

Allergy and Asthma Network/Mothers of
Asthmatics, Inc. (800–878–4403)

National Jewish Medical and Research Center
(Lung Line) (800–222–5864)

American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology
(800–842–7777)

FIGURE 3–15. HOW TO CONTROL THINGS THAT MAKE YOUR ASTHMA WORSE (CONTINUED)

Animal Dander

Some people are allergic to the flakes of skin or dried saliva from animals.

The best thing to do:

- Keep animals with fur or hair out of your home.

If you can't keep the pet outdoors, then:

- Keep the pet out of your bedroom, and keep the bedroom door closed.
- Remove carpets and furniture covered with cloth from your home. If that is not possible, keep the pet out of the rooms where these are.

Cockroach

Many people with asthma are allergic to the dried droppings and remains of cockroaches.

- Keep all food out of your bedroom.
- Keep food and garbage in closed containers (never leave food out).
- Use poison baits, powders, gels, or paste (for example, boric acid). You can also use traps.
- If a spray is used to kill roaches, stay out of the room until the odor goes away.

Vacuum Cleaning

- Try to get someone else to vacuum for you once or twice a week, if you can. Stay out of rooms while they are being vacuumed and for a short while afterward.
- If you vacuum, use a dust mask (from a hardware store), a central cleaner with the collecting bag outside the home, or a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter or a double-layered bag.*

Indoor Mold

- Fix leaking faucets, pipes, or other sources of water.
- Clean moldy surfaces.
- Dehumidify basements if possible.

Pollen and Outdoor Mold

During your allergy season (when pollen or mold spore counts are high):

- Try to keep your windows closed.
- If possible, stay indoors with windows closed during the midday and afternoon, if you can. Pollen and some mold spore counts are highest at that time.
- Ask your doctor whether you need to take or increase anti-inflammatory medicine before your allergy season starts.

Smoke, Strong Odors, and Sprays

- If possible, do not use a wood-burning stove, kerosene heater, fireplace, unvented gas stove, or heater.
- Try to stay away from strong odors and sprays, such as perfume, talcum powder, hair spray, paints, new carpet, or particle board.

Exercise or Sports

- You should be able to be active without symptoms. See your doctor if you have asthma symptoms when you are active—such as when you exercise, do sports, play, or work hard.
- Ask your doctor about taking medicine before you exercise to prevent symptoms.
- Warm up for a period before you exercise.
- Check the air quality index and try not to work or play hard outside when the air pollution or pollen levels (if you are allergic to the pollen) are high.

Other Things That Can Make Asthma Worse

- Sulfites in foods: Do not drink beer or wine or eat shrimp, dried fruit, or processed potatoes if they cause asthma symptoms.
- Cold air: Cover your nose and mouth with a scarf on cold or windy days.
- Other medicines: Tell your doctor about all the medicines you may take. Include cold medicines, aspirin, and even eye drops.