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DOES INDOOR AIR QUALITY (IAQ) AFFECT YOUR ASTHMA AND ALLERGIES?

* Everyone agrees outdoor air pollution and ozone have a bad health impact for those with asthma or allergies. We're told on high ozone days to remain indoors but **is your home's indoor air quality (IAQ) as bad as outdoor air quality?**

* **Indoor air pollution is one of the top 5 environmental health risks.** If you feel better when you leave your home than you do when inside, you might be having allergic reactions to the air inside. Poor indoor air quality (IAQ) can trigger asthma flares, be a cause of sore throats and hoarseness, cause red and itchy eyes, rhinitis (runny nose), headaches, general crankiness, and even fatigue due to allergic reactions. **How can you tell if your house has poor IAQ?**

* When you walk into your home does the air smell "stuffy" or stale? Can you smell lingering, unpleasant odors – from pets, mold, cooking or smoke? When you're inside, are your eyes, nose or throat irritated? Can you see mold or mildew on surfaces in your home? Is it too humid (over 60%) or too dry (under 30%)? Is furniture covered with dust or pet hair? If you answered yes to some or all of these questions, then you may have poor IAQ in your home.

* There are some **things that affect your home's indoor air quality** that aren't easily detected without scientific equipment: radon gas seepage; gases that contain carbon monoxide or nitrogen dioxide from poorly ventilated appliances or vehicles; pesticides, insecticides, herbicides, fungicides or rat poisons that are stored too close to the living quarters of the home; asbestos from deteriorating insulation. All of these **chemical irritations cause poor air quality too– and poor air quality, indoor or out, DOES affect your health.**

* It's difficult to individually improve outdoor air quality, but **you can control your home's indoor air quality** by following some simple steps: 1) If you can't stop smoking, then **don't smoke indoors.** Smoking is a major air pollutant and a major health deterrent. Tobacco smoke – cigarettes, cigars, pipes – contain more than 4000 chemicals, many toxic or cancer-causing. It's unhealthy for the smoker and healthier to others as secondhand smoke, especially for those with asthma. 2) Check that wood-burning **fireplaces** are properly vented so the smoke is drawn up the chimney and not into the room. Installing a glass hearth screen and cleaning and inspecting your chimney each season will help keep nitrogen dioxide gases and irritating particles from affecting your health. 3) Examine **gas stoves & gas water heaters.** They should have working exhaust fans vented to the outside. The burner flame should be blue, not yellow. This gas is odorless but a sour smelling chemical is added so we can detect gas leaks. If you detect this odor, turn off the appliance and call your gas company. The carbon monoxide that is leaking is toxic and can cause headaches, dizziness, nausea, fatigue – even death. 4) High humidity can lead to mold which can make allergy and asthma symptoms worse. **Control humidity** in your home by installing vents in your attic, basement or crawl space. If you have a humidifier or dehumidifier, clean them frequently according to manufacturer's instructions. 5) If you have **pets**, especially cats, then dander on furniture, carpeting and clothing is always a potential problem for people with allergies to dander. If you can't find a new home for your pet, restrict their access within the house, especially keeping them out of bedrooms. Bathe and comb your furry pet frequently, too. 6) **Carpeting** presents a whole array of potential health issues. **New carpets release chemicals** from the fibers, adhesives and padding which can cause headaches, sore throat, eye irritation and even fatigue so it's important to ventilate after carpet installation. **Existing carpeting that has water damage can be a breeding nest for mold and bacteria.** It's best to get rid of water damaged carpet and if possible, replace it with tile, wood, or linoleum. 7) **Eliminate as many household cleaning chemicals as possible** and store any necessary chemicals in a separate, well-ventilated place. Open windows or use fans when using these products, especially mildew removing products in bathrooms. Avoid scented room deodorizers, candles and incense too.

* If you want to learn how to improve the quality of the air you and your family breathe, plan to **attend the free public workshop "A Breath of Fresh Indoor Air"** on Saturday, April 28th, 2-4:00 pm, at the A.C.E.S. Building (Southeast corner of Speedway and 24th St) on the UT Austin Campus. Conducted by Ph.D. students from the Indoor Environmental Science and Engineering program, this interactive workshop reveals common indoor air pollutants. For more information go to www.caee.utexas.edu/igert/iaq_workshop_2007.cfm. For more information on environmental allergens, contact AAFA-TX.

Upcoming Free AAFA-TX Programs: 1) **Sat. April 21** – "Asthma & Allergy Essentials" Small Miracles Childcare, Plano, Darla Theis, instructor. 2) **Wed. April 25** –Lunch & Learn Wellness Program, Brinker International, Dallas, Dr. William Lumry, instructor. 3) **Sat. April 28** - "A Breath of Fresh Indoor Air" workshop, UT Austin campus, (see details above) 4) Are you interested in political advocacy to help improve healthcare in the USA? Attend AANMA's Asthma Conference on Capital Hill, April 30-May 2, 2007, Washington, DC. For more info, or to register go to www.breatheville.org/cityhall/ch_asthmaaware2007.htm 5) **Sat. May 5** – "Asthma & Allergy Essentials For Childcare Providers" Whispering Academy, Arlington, Suzanne Hotchkiss, instructor. 6) **June 17-22**, Great Gluten Escape Sleep-Over Camp, a Celiac Camp for kids 7-15 yrs. Camp Gilmont, Gilmore, TX, for info or to register, go to www.dallasrock.org/gge.htm 7) Looking for an Asthma Camp? For more information, contact AAFA-TX.

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