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ELIMINATE ENVIRONMENTAL TRIGGERS TO HELP CONTROL YOUR ASTHMA & ALLERGIES

*People with allergic asthma and allergies have very sensitive airways. They may react to things called triggers, stimuli that can cause asthma exacerbations or flare-ups or allergy symptoms. With asthma, exposure to triggers cause airways to become swollen, tighten up and make excess mucus. **Some triggers are allergens**, substances that occur in nature. **Other triggers are substances**, usually chemical in nature, **called irritants**. Some patients are allergic or sensitive to many allergens while others are only sensitive or allergic to one or a few. At this time, researchers don't feel any of these allergens CAUSE asthma, but they can and do start or trigger an asthma reaction or symptoms. A major step in **controlling asthma symptoms** is to **identify individual environmental triggers** and then **eliminate them** since these triggers may make asthma symptoms worse or keep a person from getting better.

***If your allergens are pollens and molds:** stay indoors during early to mid-morning hours when the pollen count is high; use air conditioning, if possible; keep windows closed during seasons when pollen and mold are highest and there are strong winds; avoid sources of outdoor molds (wet leaves, garden debris); in order to prevent sub-surface mold, avoid planting shrubs too close to the house and check bricks for cracks that allow water to seep into interior walls.

* **If your allergens are dust and dust mites:** remove carpeting laid on concrete if possible, replace with hardwood or tile flooring; avoid sitting or lying on upholstered furniture; reduce indoor humidity to less than 50 percent. Use a dehumidifier if needed and clean it regularly; avoid being in areas that are being or have been recently vacuumed; vacuum weekly with a Hepa filter vacuum and dust weekly with a damp cloth not a feather duster; use bedding encasements when possible and wash all bedding weekly in hot (130°) water; avoid knick knacks and other dust collectors; store books and toys in sealed plastic bags; only use bedroom window treatments that can be washed frequently in hot water; all pillows (foam, feather, down) have dust mites. Use encasements or buy cheap pillows and replace every few months.

* **If your allergens include animal dander** know that dander or flakes are found on the skin, hair or feathers of **all** warm-blooded pets including dogs, cats, birds and rodents. The **allergen is in the saliva** of dogs and cats, which makes dander when it dries and in the **urine and feces of rodents**. The length of the pet's hair does not make a difference. Remove any furred or feathered animals from the home if possible, and definitely isolate them from bedrooms; if furred animals are in the home it may help to bathe them weekly although that's often impractical or impossible. Horse saliva and sweat is also an allergen for some. Ask your health care provider which medication to take before visiting places where animals are present – homes of friends and family, a zoo, a farm, etc and choose a pet without fur or feathers - a fish or a snake. Make sure their cages are cleaned regularly to avoid mold build-up.

* **Cockroach allergen** is often overlooked but it's a serious health hazard and cockroaches don't discriminate: they'll go wherever there is a food or water source. Seal access points like door jambs and sink pipes. Eliminate moisture or damp areas which attract roaches and close drains when not in use. Keep food in tightly sealed containers. Disinfect all areas where roaches are found: it is their urine and feces which is the allergen.

* **Strong odors and sprays can be a powerful irritant or trigger for many.** Don't stay in a house while it is being painted. Allow enough time for the paint to dry before returning to the house and explore the possibility of using one of the new odorless paints that contain less VOC's (Volatile Chemicals). Avoid perfume and scented cosmetics such as talcum powder and hair spray. Do not use room deodorizers or scented cleaning products. Reduce strong cooking odors (especially frying) by using an exhaust fan and opening windows. Avoid using dry-erase (magic) markers that have strong odors. The permanent ink varieties are the worst.

* **If Indoor molds are your trigger:** control humidity in bathrooms and laundry rooms by ventilating to the outside; clean bathrooms, laundry rooms and kitchens regularly; use dehumidifiers in damp basements or bathrooms, with humidity level set for 30 to 50 percent and empty and clean the dehumidifier unit regularly. If mold is found, locate the source of the water, eliminate the source, repair the damage and clean the area with a 1 part bleach, 9 part water solution (if color fast); use inexpensive shower curtains or liners and wash or discard at the first sign of mildew.

* **Colds and infections are triggers for many.** Avoid people with colds or the flu, wash hands frequently to avoid contamination with bacteria or viruses **and** make sure tissues are available and disposed of properly. Sneeze or cough into the crook of your arm rather than into your hands and wash hands immediately after coming home from shopping, school, work, play. Soap and water (hot or cold) are all you need but wash hands well at least for 20 seconds.

* **Weather can affect many.** Pull a scarf or turtleneck over your mouth and nose in cold weather and on windy days. Avoid air pollution by staying indoors on days when the pollution or ozone count is high and try not to become over-heated in hot weather and drink lots of water. Changing seasons are the most vulnerable time for asthmatics and those with airborne allergies. Making these changes will help keep asthma flare-ups from starting. Let the doctor know if the environmental trigger control plan is not working. For more info, contact info@aafatexas.org

Upcoming AAFA-TX programs: 1) June 17 "Tools To Manage Asthma & Allergies" **Worksite Wellness program, Citi Group, Irving, Neil Singhania, MD, instructor** 2) Aug. 17, "Asthma Management & Education" a CE program for nurses and respiratory therapists, Ft. Worth, instructor TBA. Pre-registration required. Ft. Worth ISD nurses are automatically registered. 3) Sept. 3, "Asthma Management & Education" a CE program for nurses and respiratory therapists, Seattle, WA, instructor TBA. Pre-registration required. Seattle Public School nurses are automatically pre-registered. For more info or to register, contact info@aafatexas.org or see www.aafatexas.org/events

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