

**AVOIDING TRIGGERS IS THE BEST POLICY!**

*By Paul Salva, M.D.*

Take asthma medication as prescribed by your doctor. If you have persistent asthma, you should be on a ‘controller,’ anti-inflammatory medication taken daily (such as Aerobid, Aerobid-M, Azmacort, Beclovent, Decadron, Flovent, Pulmicort, Respinaler, or Vanceril). You may also be prescribed a ‘reliever’ bronchodilator medication to be used during an acute attack of asthma symptoms (such as Alupent, Astmahaler, Brethair, Broniten, Bronkaid, Bronkmeter, Maxair, Metaprel, Primatene, Primatene Mist, Proventil, Serevent, Tornalate, or Ventolin).

Asthma is one of the most common chronic conditions in the United States. It affects all age groups. Nearly 7% of the population has asthma. Asthma symptoms are caused by ‘triggers’. Some common asthma triggers are dust and dust mites, cat & dog hair, cockroaches, cigarette smoke, car exhaust, fragrances (like perfume, cologne and air freshener sprays), pollens, and molds.

Autumn is a time of year that presents additional asthma triggers. It is a time of warm days and cold nights. Sudden drops in temperature from warm to cold can trigger asthma symptoms. The smoke from wood burning stoves and fireplaces is another trigger on the increase during this time of year. Autumn is also ragweed season. Ragweed releases its pollen especially in the morning and the wind may carry it into the house through open windows. Decaying leaves on the wet

ground causes the growth of molds, which can also trigger asthma. These may cause problems for children waiting outdoors for the school bus. After snow falls, outdoor Autumn triggers decrease. However, they can still be present in indoor plants and flower arrangements. Colds and other respiratory infections that usually occur more often during

this time of year are additional triggers. Dress warm and stay away from people with colds. Get a flu shot if your doctor recommends it.

In autumn we begin to spend more time indoors with the house closed up, so indoor triggers become a problem. Pet hair from direct contact as well as airborne exposure (small particles flying in the air) can trigger asthma symptoms. Do not allow pets in bedrooms or near bedclothes. Cockroaches in areas like the kitchen, living room and bedroom leave behind cockroach dander. Consult an exterminator for help with this problem. Dust and dust mites build up indoors as well. Damp dust surfaces using a dampened cloth to trap dust so it does not become airborne. Vacuum corners and furniture edges where dust tends to collect. Laundry bed linen and pillows weekly in water that is at least 130 degrees (the HOT button on most washing machines). This temperature will kill dust mites. Sunlight also kills dust mites. Cover pillows, mattress and box spring with allergen-proof covers, available at most department stores.

*If you do not understand how to take your asthma medication, call your doctor for an appointment as soon as possible to review medication instructions.*

*Dr. Paul Salva is a pediatric pulmonologist in the Springfield, Mass. area. He lectures and writes on the topic of asthma.*

