Does Humidity Make Asthma Worse?

by REBECCA PACIOREK

Humidity and Asthma

Summer is here, and the temperatures keep climbing. Even worse, the humidity is rising as well. Have you ever noticed that it is harder to breathe when the humidity goes up? You are not alone. Many people with lung diseases such as asthma or COPD find this to be a commonality. Let’s take a look at the causes of breathing difficulties during humid times and find out what you can do to counter that.

Why is it Difficult to Breathe in Humidity?

Asthma causes the airways to constrict making it hard to breathe. Humidity acts the same way. When the humid air is breathed in, it also causes the airways to become narrow. That narrowing is mimicking asthma and also makes it hard to take in a breath.

How Does Humidity Affect Asthma?

Many asthmatics can feel a humid day coming on. As the humidity rises, they might start to have some coughing and shortness of breath. When the humidity begins going over 60 percent, that is when people tend to start feeling it the most. But, not only is the weather itself causing asthmatics issues, but the higher humidity is also a cause for things like smog and other air pollutants like ozone and car exhaust.

This is why you will often hear about the Air Quality Index and warnings to stay inside when the air quality is at certain unhealthier levels. In addition to the air quality though, is the fact that the higher humidity is a breeding ground for mold and dust mites which also tend to irritate the lungs. And, on top of all that, the pollen levels will tend to go up causing those with allergic asthma to have their allergies and asthma go haywire.

Don’t be fooled into believing that high humidity is the only thing to look out for though. The cold/dry air can also cause your asthma to flare up. Cold air naturally acts to shrink your airways. And, this is what causes the asthma flare in the first place.

If you typically have exercise-induced asthma, you will find that the more you huff and puff to rapidly breathe in during the cold, the more likely you are to have a flare. This is because you are breathing rapidly and also end up inhaling through your mouth which makes the air more dry and colder than usual.

In general, it is suggested to keep your house between 30% to 60% humidity. You can look into installing a whole house humidifier of some sort, or you can purchase portable systems that will either add or subtract humidity from your indoor air.

What Can I Do to Make it Easier to Breathe When it’s Humid Outside?

When it is hot and humid outside, there are some things you can do to try and lessen the effects on your asthma.

Lessen other asthma irritants by avoiding things that you know will trigger your asthma. For example, perfumes, aerosols and smoking.

Here are some tips on how to cope with both humidity and asthma during the warmer months:

- Stay on top of your preventive medicines and talk to your doctor right away if they do not seem to be effective.
- Install a dehumidifier in your home or purchase a portable one. Set it to keep your home between 30% to 50%.
- Stay indoors/keep on your air conditioner as much as possible. This keeps the air moving in your home and help prevents the mold from growing and dust mites from breeding.
- Avoid strenuous exercise outdoors during the hottest and most humid times. (Like late afternoons.)

- Keep an eye on the air quality index. You can use some of the free apps from places like the Weather Channel, Accuweather and AirNow. These apps will typically alert you to times/days to be aware of. Not only are there apps that will alert you to the weather temperatures and humidity but you can even use an app to let you know when your local pollen counts will be up or when there are smog alerts, and much more.
- Beware at the pool. Some people have their asthma triggered by chlorine. In general, swimming is normally a great exercise so do not skip the pool and take note if it is a time your asthma might act up.
- Stay hydrated. The less dry your lungs are, the less likely they will constrict and cause an asthma flare.
- Keep your rescue inhaler handy. In general, if you have asthma, you should probably carry an inhaler with you. But, during times when you know you are apt to have some seasonal asthma struggles, it is even more important to be sure you are prepared, by using an asthma action plan, for a possible asthma flare.

Having asthma can make catching your breath a bit tougher in the summertime, but if you are armed with a little knowledge and some common sense, you can muddle through just fine.

Are there any tips we missed? Be sure to share them with us if so.