Is Dry Air Making Your Asthma Symptoms Worse? You May Want to Try a Humidifier

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Does a Humidifier Help with Asthma?

As someone with asthma, I am always seeking something that will improve my symptoms. I'm looking for something that may be cheaper than my prescription albuterol but needs to be just as effective. (Though I have since learned that there is no alternative.) I am on the search for any treatment that can give me a little bit of relief.

Enter… the humidifier. So, does a humidifier help with asthma and can this be an alternative way to help asthmatic symptoms? Let's take a look.

What Is a Humidifier?

A humidifier is a tool used for adding moisture to the air. These devices are extremely useful in dry areas and can be helpful when dryness provokes irritation of certain areas of the body, such as the skin and nose.

There are different health uses of humidifiers:

- Dry skin
- Sinus congestion and sinus headaches
- Dry throat
- Nose irritation
- Cracked lips
- Dry cough
- Bloody noses
- Irritated vocal cords

Unfortunately, overuse of humidifiers can worsen respiratory symptoms.

How Does a Humidifier Work?

At a very basic level, most humidifiers use a fan and a wick filter. The filter soaks up water, drawing it from the basin towards to the top where the fan is located. The fan uses air to assist with evaporating the water – it disperses the vapor into the room.

According to iFixit, "Evaporative humidifiers have the added benefit of being self-regulating, meaning that when the humidity in a room is already at a sufficient level, the evaporation process will naturally slow down, as it's more difficult for water to evaporate in a humid environment."

What Are the Benefits of Using a Humidifier?

There are various benefits to using a humidifier. Obviously, the number one benefit is that it adds moisture to the air, which is a win for those who have dry skin and other maladies that are caused by dryness.

Other proven benefits of using a humidifier:

- It may prevent the flu. According to various studies, adding influenza to the air in a 40% humidified room caused made the virus less infectious.
- A cough becomes more productive. A dry cough can be painful. Adding humidity allows moisture to enter the airways, thereby allowing for the cough to become productive. Though it is still not fun, perhaps the cough becomes less painful and it allows the person with the cough to release phlegm.
- It may reduce snoring. If someone who snores sleeps in a dry room, snoring may increase because the nasal passages are dry. Adding humidity may lubricate the nasal passages, reducing snoring.
- Not only will you feel better, your plants will feel better. Your plants need moisture and they may get more regular moisture living in a room with a humidifier.

Can a Humidifier Help Improve Asthma Symptoms?

Without a doubt, yes, a humidifier can improve asthma symptoms. However, too much humidity can also worsen asthma symptoms. The ideal home humidity lies somewhere between 30% and 50%.

Mayo Clinic notes that having the proper humidity in the home can ease not only asthma symptoms, but allergy symptoms, in children and adults.

It is important to keep the humidifier clean; a dirty humidifier can worsen symptoms, even if the humidity level is appropriate.

What Are the Best Types of Humidifiers for Asthmatics?

There are various types of humidifiers available and it is good to know which type suits your health needs.

Central Humidifiers

These humidifiers are large devices that are built into the framework of the home that are attached to the air conditioning or heating unit. Though they are the most expensive option, they are the most effective if you need to add moisture to your entire home.

Evaporators

An evaporator is a single-unit system. It blows moisture through a moistened filter using a fan to blow the moisture into the air. Evaporators are a cheaper alternative to other humidifiers, but they are only effective in one room.

Impeller Humidifiers

These types of humidifiers are the safest because they do not cause burns. They are often used in children’s rooms because even if a child plays with it, it can do no harm; they emit a cool mist. The impeller uses discs that rotate at high speeds. They also only operate in one room.

Steam Vaporizers

Steam vaporizers are the cheapest type of humidifier available. They heat the liquid before cooling it off, then emit the vapor in order to humidify the room. Because the humidifier is heating the liquid, there is a risk for burns.

Ultrasonic Humidifiers

These types produce either a warm or cool mist, depending on the type purchased. There is a low risk of injury and they are generally safe for children.

Humidifiers can further be broken down into console humidifiers and central humidifiers:

- Console humidifiers: add moisture to the entire home, large devices, often portable
- Personal humidifiers: smaller devices, can be transportable, can be used while traveling

In Conclusion

Any humidifier can be effective for someone with asthma. An asthmatic often has worsened symptoms due to dry air and adding moisture to the air can improve these symptoms, lessening the likelihood of an asthma attack. Perhaps the worst humidifier is the evaporator; evaporators tend to cause mold formation. Molds can be a trigger for those with asthma.

For children with asthma, purchasing a humidifier that has a low risk of injury is also important. It may be tempting to purchase a cheap humidifier for a small room, but select a humidifier that will humidify the room and has little risk for injury, such as an ultrasonic or impeller humidifier.