How to Manage Asthma and Allergies During the Springtime

by ERIC PATTERSON

Coping With Spring Asthma

Asthma has a funny way of turning your life upside down. If you watch the news or scroll through social media, you see people bursting with anticipation about spring being here. For them, spring means warmer weather, vibrant colors returning to the trees, spring cleaning and outdoor parties and activities. They are happy to say goodbye to the winter doldrums as they welcome in spring.

For you, the story is a bit different. With your asthma, spring means more danger, more attacks and more anxiety about the next attack. It means that you must be more careful about where you go and what you do to protect your health and well-being. Sometimes, you wish winter would last another month or two.

You know that spring makes your seasonal allergies worse. What are you going to do with that information? Will you stay in and stay away to protect yourself? Will you throw caution to the wind and head out into the world? Or will you venture into the world in a thoughtful, safe way? If the last choice seems like the best choice, read on.

Know Your Targets

Before you can know how to make this spring better, you must recount the events of last spring. What triggered your springtime symptoms? What did you do to address your asthma symptoms? Was it effective? What more could you have done?

These questions are not about finding or assigning blame to you or anyone else. Their goal is to help you identify what works and what doesn't work for your asthma in spring.

Your triggers are the target. Keep them in your crosshairs so that you can limit your symptoms. Dust, pollen, dander, grass and stress are major triggers that return or flare in the spring. Think about each and their impact on your symptoms. If you are uncertain about your targets, work with your doctor to identify the main asthma contributors.

Take Action

Now that you have a better understanding of your asthma and spring's ability to change symptoms, begin thinking about the needed steps to protect yourself while maintaining the high quality of life you deserve. Here's how:

Begin Before Spring

Some of the best measures are done when the snow still covers the ground. Schedule a pre-spring appointment with your doctor to plan and discuss the best interventions to lower your risk and improve your chances for success with asthma in spring.

Be sure to mention your goals and concerns so that your doctor can explore new interventions or remind you of your limitations. If your doctor does not accurately understand your symptoms, be sure to elaborate and check in for complete clarity.

Next page: think exercise, landscaping, parties, and picnics

Think Exercise

The positives attached to exercise are nearly limitless. If you want to feel better, look better and stay healthy, exercise is a must.

For people with asthma, exercise in the spring is a risky proposition. Watching others walk, jog and bike out your window may have you forgetting about the poor experiences you had last spring, but the air quality mixed with exercised-induced asthma can present a challenge not worth taking.

Since exercise is too important to skip, try to keep your exercise confined to indoors. If your home feels less conducive, try heading to a nearby gym for a change of scenery. Try to find a workout spot with large windows and bright lights to mirror the feeling of outdoors.

If you can’t live without that walk around the block, experiment with different times of the day when asthma targets are low.

Think Landscaping

Spring brings a set of responsibilities not found in winter: landscaping and yard maintenance. If you live in an apartment, consider yourself lucky to not have this stress to consider. The grass needs to be mowed. The shrubs need to be trimmed. The flowers need to be planted and the beds need to be weeded.

Sure, it would be simpler to pay a professional to care for your outdoor needs, but the costs can be too restricting. If it is on your shoulders, proceed, but proceed with caution. Try getting work done early in the morning or later in the evening when pollen counts tend to be lower.
Choose work days based on the influence of humidity and rain on your symptoms. A particle mask might be a good option to keep triggers out of your system.

If the environment is not right for you, don’t push your luck. Whatever you needed to do today can wait until next weekend. A nicely manicured yard is not worth your health.

Think Parties and Picnics

Springtime is synonymous with picnics, family gatherings and celebrations. Attending these events can put you at risk of higher symptoms as campfires, pollen, flowers, weeds, insects and even insect repellants can trigger your asthma.

With this being the case, let others know how your asthma in spring is and offer some modifications that work well for you. They may not know that citronella and bug sprays bother you. A little education can go a long way.

Think Spring Cleaning

The spring risks are not confined to the outside world. Inside, the risks are the yearly spring cleaning ritual. Scrubbing your home from top to bottom is no fun in the first place, but a clean home can reduce indoor asthma targets.

Be sure to use cleaning products that are effective for cleaning while being harmless to you. Stay away from cleaners with heavy fragrances and chemical smells to lower your risk. Look at labels to check for ones

recognized as being environmentally safe, as these tend to be safer to people with asthma.

Next Page: think anxiety and safety plan

Think Anxiety

The mere thought of spring has the ability to pique the anxiety of someone with seasonal allergies or asthma. In a curious way, that anxiety and stress can lead to worsening asthma symptoms.

If you find yourself feeling nervous about your next attack or being worried about performing the required outdoor tasks, spend some time working on your relaxation skills. Paying attention to your body is doubly important for someone with asthma. Increased attention and self-monitoring can identify an attack before it starts and can reduce the risk of a future attack.

Relaxation techniques involving deep, diaphragmatic breathing are the obvious choice. Sit comfortably in a chair or lay flat on your back to fill your lungs with air. Imagine your stomach inflating like a balloon to avoid shallow breathing in your chest.

This process increases oxygen in your blood, which leads to a slowed heart rate and an overall feeling of relaxation. It’s just what you need.

Think Safety Plan

Your spring needs to be a safe spring. What interventions will increase your safety? Steps like taking your medication as prescribed and having your inhaler handy may seem simple but are often overlooked. Having an asthma action plan, like this one, can remind you and those around you of the steps needed to maintain your health in the spring.

Asthma alert bracelets can complement your toolbox well by informing people about your condition. You may not be able to prevent every asthma attack or flare in symptoms, but you can always stay prepared.

Think About Afterwards

Staying safe isn’t only about the time that you are outdoors, it extends to the time that you return inside. Avoiding contaminating your home with outdoor triggers can go a long way for continued symptom management.

Anything that flies through the air can stick to your body and can shed off inside. Track the benefits of changing clothes and showering when returning inside. Never hang your clothes outside to dry for the same reason.

Conclusion

If springtime has you hiding inside while your anxiety grows, take some steps to change your behaviors. A few modifications can make exercise, landscaping, cleaning and parties much more fun.

Along the way, be sure to focus on steps to reduce the anxiety that accompanies springtime asthma. Taking these steps and keeping yourself safe will change spring into your favorite time of year.

Find new options for your symptoms as new life bursts around you.