Air Pollution Can Directly Impact Asthma Symptoms

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Asthma and Air Pollution

Air pollution is a major cause of asthma attacks. Recent studies have found that 131 million Americans live in highly polluted areas where the quality of air is decreased due to cars, factories and power plants.

If you or your child is diagnosed with asthma, be aware of the air pollutants that can trigger asthma and learn how to avoid them.

Pollutants That Trigger Asthma

Among various air pollutants, two most commonly trigger asthma symptoms: ozone and particle pollution.

Ozone is found in smog and had been linked with asthma flare-ups. Ozone is produced when the pollutant substances from cars or factories react with oxygen and sunlight. Cities like Los Angeles, Houston and New York City are examples of areas where the ozone levels are extremely high.

Particle pollution is found in haze, smoke and dust and is made of various chemical substances such as nitrates, sulfates, organic chemicals, or dust particles.

Avoiding Air Pollution

Pay attention to your symptoms, especially during exercise. Do you experience more coughing, wheezing, or chest discomfort more often when the air is polluted? If the answer is yes, it is likely you are sensitive to air pollutants.

If you are sensitive to indoor pollutants such as dust mites and mold, you are likely sensitive to outdoor pollutants as well.

Know when the air pollution in your area is worse. Ozone from smog is worse during the hot days of summer, particularly in the afternoon and evenings, so you may want to work out in the morning during the summer, or exercise indoors during hot smoggy days.

Particle pollution builds up when the weather is calm, regardless of the season.

Avoid exercise outdoors if there is excessive smoke in the air from fireplaces or wood stoves, and if you live near busy roads avoid exercising outdoors during rush hour; change your schedule accordingly.

Check the weather channels or listen to the radio, as they provide reports on the Air Quality Index.

The air index is symbolized by different colors – if you see the color purple or maroon it means that the levels of

air pollutants are extremely high and you should spend as much time as possible indoors. Colors like green and yellow indicate low and moderate levels of air pollution. You can also find updated information at AirNow.

Have your quick relief medication handy and use it as recommended by your doctor.

If you are a woman who wishes to become pregnant avoid air pollutants as much as possible before and during the pregnancy. A 2014 study found that exposure to air pollutants during the second trimester increases the risk of the baby developing asthma in early childhood.

Another study found babies exposed to nitrogen dioxide (a motor vehicle air pollutant) during their first year of life have an increased risk of developing asthma later on in life.