Helpful Lifestyle Changes to Improve Life With Asthma

by ANGLEA FINLAY

Living With Asthma

Even though asthma isn't always in flare, you need to stick to a healthy daily routine to keep symptoms from creeping into your daily life. Although inhaled steroids and bronchodilators play an important role, all your other choices add up to inflame, maintain, or reduce your symptoms. In turn, it's worth examining your diet, activity level, hobbies, and environment to uncover any potential problems.

First and foremost, you need to know your triggers and learn to stay away from them. Not surprisingly, tobacco smoke is regarded as the worst irritant for asthma, and so it has no place in your work or home life. Aside from avoiding smoke, there are other steps to a cleaner living space that should reduce your discomfort and help you avoid unpleasant attacks.

Give Your Bedroom a Facelift

You spend about a third of your life sleeping, so be sure your sleep space is as clean and fresh as your other living spaces. You may not need a full renovation, just a few clever adjustments in the right places:

Stay Clean

You probably clean your bedding regularly, but how clean does it really get? Since water needs to be at least 130 °F to kill dust mites, experts suggest washing your sheets and pillow cases at least once a week on your washer's hottest setting.

It's a good idea to cover your pillows and mattress in dust-proof zippered covers to protect the fabric from mites. If your bedroom is carpeted, you also need to be diligent about vacuuming, but you might want to have someone do it for you: a vacuum can kick up dirt, dust, and allergens into the air, so it's best to wait 15 or 20 minutes before going into a freshly vacuumed space.

Stay Dry

Moisture is mold's best friend, so don't let things get damp. Bring in a dehumidifier to keep humidity below 60%, and use air conditioning on particularly hot and humid days. Remember to empty the container of the dehumidifier often and wipe it clean, to keep mildew at bay.

Since really dry air can worsen asthma symptoms, be careful not to suck all the humidity out of the room. If air conditioning is drying out the air too much, a standing fan might be a safer bet for a more comfortable sleep that won't make your asthma worse at night.

Keep It Simple

Clutter collects dust in the blink of an eye, so clear your dressers, night table, and any other surfaces of knickknacks and unnecessary accessories. Decorative pillows look nice, but they're not worth the irritants. Likewise, scented candles, diffusers and potpourri are nearly impossible to keep dust-free, plus the scents can trigger asthma symptoms.

Keep Moving

Increasing your level of activity can be uncomfortable when your asthma symptoms are bothering you, but regular exercise is one of the best ways to strengthen your lungs for long-term improvement in your breathing.

Weight Maintenance

The more weight you carry, the more pressure you're putting on your ribcage and lungs, and the harder it is to breathe deeply. In fact, asthmatics who are overweight tend to struggle with asthma control, since their medications don't work as well as they should. If you can reach and maintain a healthy weight, you will almost certainly see an improvement in your breathing. Exercise is an important step in the right direction.

Less Stress, More Happiness

Studies show that those who work out regularly tend to have more positive attitudes and lower stress levels than inactive people. Since stress and anxiety can manifest in physical ways – like tightness in the chest wall and hyperventilation — it's in your best interest to do what you can to reduce your daily stress. Aerobic exercise is important, but try to incorporate some yoga and meditation into your exercise regime, for added relaxation.

Next page: diet changes to make for better living with asthma.

Keep Moving

Cardiovascular Health

A strong heart and lungs are a cornerstone of whole-body health; better posture, stronger chest muscles, and more efficient circulation all help to decrease asthma symptoms.

If you have trouble doing any aerobic activity, this is a sign that your asthma is not being properly controlled. If your asthma is under control but if you still start to cough and wheeze after exercise, you're likely suffering from exercise-induced asthma.

Talk to your doctor about treating these symptoms, rather than quitting your workout routine — the benefits of exercise almost always outweighs the risks.

Improve Your Diet

Even if you don't have any food allergies, what you eat can stir up asthma discomforts before you know it. Heartburn tends to make chest symptoms worse; chronic severe heartburn (gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)) can even cause long-term damage to the airways. In turn, a diet that promotes good digestion, a calm stomach, and healthy weight loss can actually improve and protect your breathing.

Cut out Irritating Foods

Some culprits are fairly obvious – spicy foods, coffee and caffeine, and alcohol – but other heartburn sources might go unnoticed for a while. Chocolate and peppermint are two such ingredients, and although they're often found in desserts, they're not great ways to end your meal.

Certain foods can directly affect your asthma, too. Some people find that sulfites in wine, beer, pickled foods, and

dried fruits can lead to chest discomfort and breathing problems. You may want to start a food diary to find out which ingredients may be interfering with your asthma.

Limit Portion Size (Especially Before Bed)

The more your stomach has to digest, the more likely acids will back up into your esophagus. But big portions also lead to big weight gain, and the more extra weight you carry, the worse your heartburn *and* asthma symptoms.

It's a good idea to cut down your portion size at every meal, but especially in the evenings, since heartburn tends to worsen when you lay down to sleep. Stay away from acidic and spicy foods at dinnertime, and do your best to cut down the amount of fat you eat (herbs and aromatic spices can stand in for the rich flavor of oils and butter).

Focus on Fresh Produce

It's no secret than a wholesome diet is better for your waistline, but it's also important for a strong immune system. Since respiratory infections are leading causes of asthma attacks, you could always use an immune boost.

Deep and bright colored fruits and vegetables are your biggest allies: these are packed with antioxidants and a range of vitamins that keep your immune system running at top speed. Aim for a rainbow of colors, and favor high-fiber veggies over fruit if you're trying to shed a few pounds.

In the end, the more active your role in your asthma management, the better off you'll be. Taking control of your condition helps you overcome anxiety with confidence, and a good knowledge base will help you avoid small problems that could otherwise become bigger medical issues. Make your wellbeing your first priority by cooking healthy meals, keeping your surroundings allergen-free, and tending to your symptoms at the very first sign of trouble.