

Spring 2023

Healthy Together

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Pollen and Mold: How to Avoid These Asthma Triggers

When you have asthma, your airways may be sensitive to tiny particles in the air, such as pollen and mold. These allergens can make it hard to catch your breath.

Sound familiar? If so, the arrival of spring may have you ready to run and hide. After all, spring is when many plants, trees and grasses start to release their pollen. This continues into summer and fall.

Mold is usually in the air from summer to early fall. But mold can also grow indoors in damp areas of your home year-round.

The Effect on Allergies and Asthma

People who are allergic to pollen or mold may have symptoms including:

- Sneezing
- Congestion or a runny nose
- Red or watery eyes
- Itchy eyes, nose, mouth and throat

If you also have asthma, these allergens can cause your airways to swell and trigger an asthma attack.

What Can You Do?

The best way to prevent an allergic reaction—and an asthma attack—is to avoid or reduce your exposure to pollen and mold.

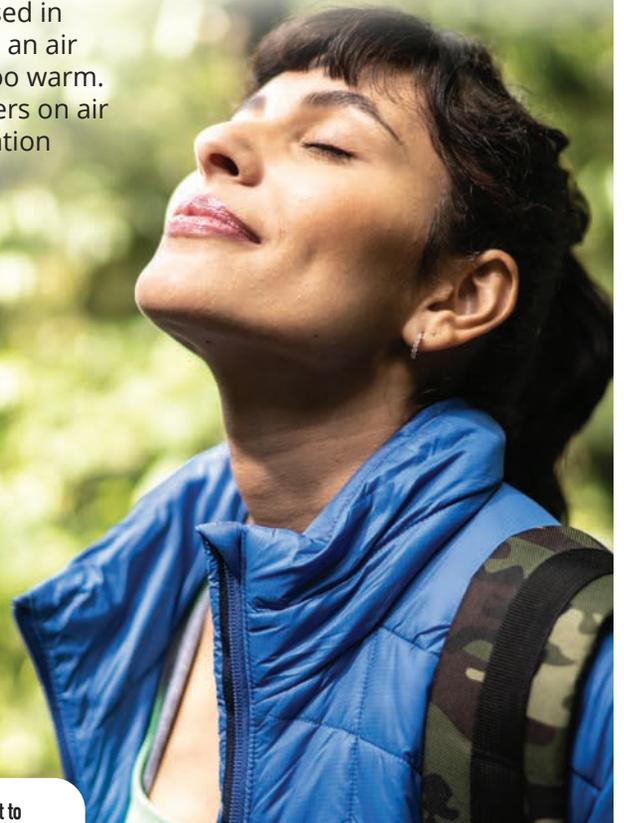
Here are some tips to keep you breathing easy:

- Check the daily weather report to find out local pollen and mold counts. When counts are high, limit your time outdoors.
- Wear a dust mask when doing yard work.
- Wash your skin and hair when you come in from outside.
- Keep your windows closed in your home and car. Use an air conditioner when it is too warm.
- Clean or replace the filters on air conditioners and ventilation systems regularly.

- Use an exhaust fan in damp areas of your home that may have mold, such as the kitchen, bathroom and basement.
- Clean damp areas of your home regularly.
- Use a dehumidifier to keep indoor humidity at or below 50%.

If these steps to reduce your exposure to pollen and mold do not keep your asthma in check, your health care provider may prescribe allergy medicines or shots to help.

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Sleep Your Way to a Healthier Heart

If you are like many Americans, your heart health is less than great. According to recent research, only about 20% of people have a ticker that is in top shape.

Fortunately, there are things you can do to boost your heart health.

In fact, the American Heart Association (AHA) recently began highlighting the benefits of sleep for your heart. Here is what you need to know.

The Newest Key to Success

For more than a decade, the AHA has emphasized seven ways to improve heart health. They are:

1. Stay active.
2. Eat a good diet.
3. Do not smoke.
4. Maintain a healthy weight.
5. Control your cholesterol.
6. Control your blood sugar.
7. Manage your blood pressure.

In a brand-new update, AHA experts add getting enough sleep to this list.

All together, these heart-healthy strategies are known as Life's Essential 8™.

Why Sleep Matters

A lack of sleep — or too much — can cause a wide range of poor health effects. These include depression, cognitive decline and heart disease. Poor sleep harms your heart by affecting certain risk factors. For instance, your blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar all rise when you do not get enough rest.

Meanwhile, getting just the right amount of sleep leads to:

- A stronger immune system
- A better mood
- More resilient cells, tissues and blood vessels
- Improved focus, memory and problem-solving
- Lower risk for chronic diseases

Most adults need 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. Children need even more. If you are having trouble getting enough shut-eye, talk with your health care team.

Lights Out: Tips for Better Sleep

Phones and other devices can get in the way of good rest. To break the cycle:

- Charge your device far away from your bed.
- Set a bedtime alarm, so you know it is time to unwind.
- Turn off nighttime notifications.
- Dim your screen or use a red filter app. Both can help prevent blue light from blocking production of the sleep hormone melatonin.
- Get into the habit of putting the device down altogether at least an hour before bed.

health briefs

Protect Your Teeth

Yes, that means brushing and flossing. But caring for teeth also means avoiding injury. Wearing a well-fitted mouth guard when playing sports can help. It will also protect your lips, tongue and jaw. Athletes of all skill levels can benefit.



Know Your Status

About 1 in 8 people with HIV in the U.S. do not know they have it. That is one reason the CDC suggests everyone ages 13 to 64 get tested at least once. You may need to be tested more often depending on your risk for HIV. Learn more at www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics.



Get Screened

The American Diabetes Association now says everyone should start screening for prediabetes and type 2 diabetes at age 35. Adults who are overweight or have other risk factors may need to start even sooner. Talk with your health care provider about this and other screening tests.



Accessing Health Care When You Live in the Country

Rural life has a lot going for it: More space, more nature, close-knit communities. Yet there can also be challenges, especially when it comes to your health. You may have fewer choices than in the city for where to get care or buy healthy groceries, for example. If that's the case, it's important to look for ways to resolve common issues.

Limited Health Services

Health care providers may be few and far between where you live. Yet having access to care is important in order to prevent, diagnose and treat health issues.

What you can do:

- Look for a primary care provider or health clinic that serves your area now. Do not wait until you are sick to do it.

- Get to know the community health worker if there is one where you live. This is a trained person who offers basic health services and can connect you with more help when needed.

No Transportation

Less populated places often lack public transportation. This makes it hard to get to appointments if you do not have a car or are not able to drive.

What you can do:

- Catch a ride with a neighbor.
- Find out if a local group can connect you with a volunteer driver.
- Call your health insurance plan to see if it covers nonemergency medical transportation. If so, learn how to request a ride.

- Ask your provider if they offer telehealth visits via phone or computer.

Fewer Options for Healthy Foods

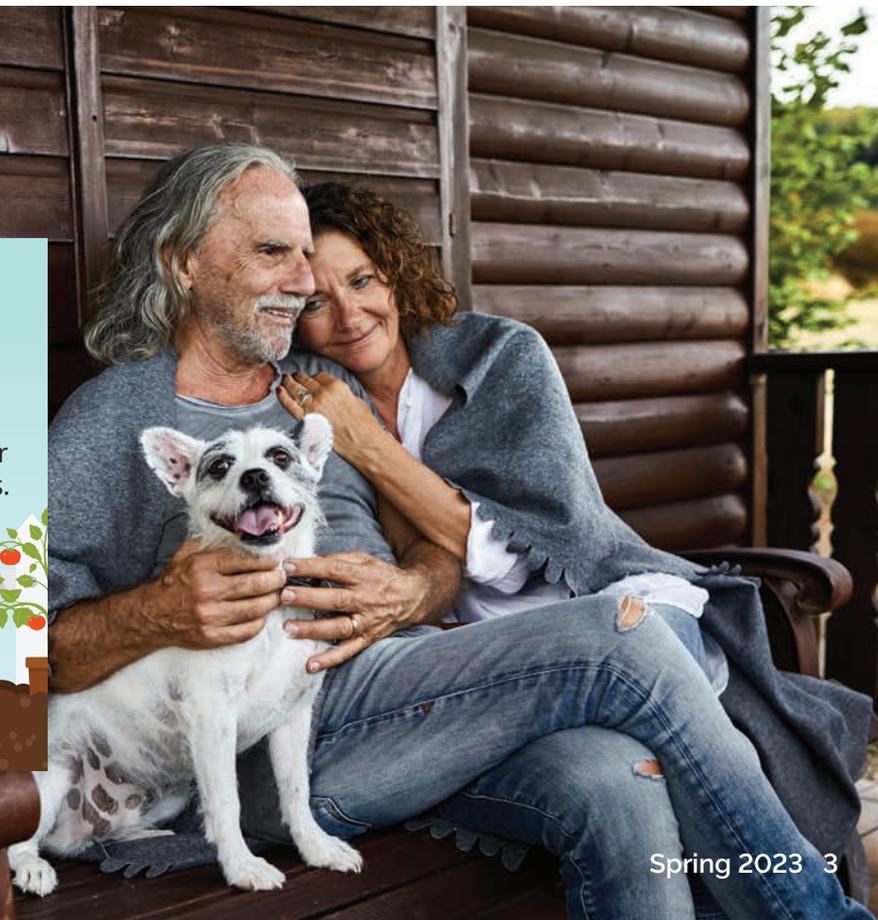
In a rural area, there may not be many places to buy nutritious, affordable food.

What you can do:

- Make every grocery shopping trip count. Shop the sales and buy in bulk when you can.
- Include some good-for-you nonperishable items. Put dried beans, whole grains and canned tuna packed in water on your list.
- Use frozen or canned fruits and vegetables. Bring along a cooler to keep frozen foods chilled during a long drive home.
- For fresh produce, visit a local farm stand or plant a garden.

Gardening Tip.

Growing your own veggies? To extend the season for your harvest, you can use protective structures and covers. Some can be made from inexpensive or found materials. Look to your local garden center or Cooperative Extension Service office for ideas.





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Call **1-800-562-4620** to discuss any of the topics in this newsletter or any other health issues. Visit our Website at **www.OHPCC.org**.

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Even Short Workouts Can Save Lives

Do you have an extra 10 minutes a day to scroll on your phone? Or binge your favorite show? Odds are, your answer is yes. You would happily find the time.

What about an extra 10 minutes a day for exercise? If your answer changed to a hesitant *maybe*, you might want to reconsider. Those 10 minutes could be enough to extend your life!

Science Says: Move More

According to a new study, short spurts of physical activity can make a big difference. Researchers estimate that if U.S. adults ages 40 to 85 added 10 minutes of exercise to their daily routines, more than 110,000 deaths could be prevented each year. That is worth getting off the couch for!

There is not one type of exercise that is best. Pick what you enjoy, and you will reap the rewards. All

that matters is that you work out at a moderate intensity. That means you will get your heart pumping and you will be breathing harder. If you can still talk, but not sing, that is a good amount of effort.

Good for Mind, Body and Sleep

As if a longer life was not enough, exercise has many more benefits. Almost right away after being active, your blood pressure drops. Your feelings of anxiety lessen. And you may find your sleep improves, too.

Physical activity also plays a role in disease and injury prevention. In addition to stronger bones and muscles, exercise leads to a lower risk for:

- Type 2 diabetes
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Several types of cancer
- Weight gain
- Falls

