

Managing Asthma During Winter

from The Asthma Foundation

Winter brings cold weather and keeps us inside, where indoor triggers such as dust mites, pet allergens, smoke and viruses can worsen asthma symptoms. Cold, dry air may cause airways to tighten, making breathing more difficult. Winter is also the season for colds and influenza. As many as 8 out of 10 asthma attacks in children and 4 out of 10 in adults are triggered by viral infections.

Have an Asthma Action Plan

If you do not have a written Asthma Action Plan please discuss this with your doctor next time you visit. As with any other time of year, it is very important to keep your asthma under control. This includes having regular reviews with your doctor, taking the proper medication regularly as indicated on your Asthma Action Plan and avoiding your asthma triggers.

Managing winter triggers

As cold air can trigger asthma, you could try wearing a scarf around your mouth, and try to breathe through your nose, which warms and humidifies the air. Avoid smoke from tobacco, fireplaces and wood stoves as this can trigger asthma symptoms. Gas fireplaces and stoves should be flued, and should be checked and serviced regularly to prevent gas leaks.

Maintain a healthy level of exercise

If asthma limits your physical activity, then it is likely that your asthma is not under control – see your doctor if you have regular symptoms during or after exercising. Asthma shouldn't stop you from exercising outside in the winter.

Take preventer medications as prescribed

Take your preventer medications regularly, protect yourself from the cold, and warm up and cool down properly. Exercise is important for everyone and can be done indoors on very cold days (eg. in a gym, your home, or a heated swimming pool).

Tips for the prevention and management of colds and influenza

Talk to your doctor about the influenza vaccine. Reduce the spread of viruses by:

- keeping your hands away from your eyes, nose, and mouth
- use tissues to wipe your nose, then discard them in the waste bin
- wash your hands after blowing your nose or covering your mouth for a cough or sneeze, and before preparing or eating food
- do not share cups or cutlery with other people

If you do catch a virus - remember to stick to your written Asthma Action Plan!

Your doctor can assess the severity of your illness, advise you on treatment and help you to better manage your asthma through the illness. It is especially important you consult your doctor if symptoms are persistent or severe.

For more information go to <http://www.asthmaaustralia.org.au>