

allergy &
asthma

ISSUES

a seasonal guide for relief

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AAAI
AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ALLERGY
ASTHMA & IMMUNOLOGY

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR DOCTOR'S APPOINTMENT

With allergy season in full-swing, many parents are fitting doctor's visits for their children into busy schedules. Here are some tips to make those visits as productive as possible.

Start by thinking of you, your child and your allergist as members of a team. Then do the following:

Stay educated. Nancy Ostrom, MD, FAAAAI, understands the importance of patient education. "The more you know about allergic diseases and asthma, the more you can contribute to effective office visits for your and your child's health," she reports. The Internet hosts a variety of health-related Web sites, but Dr. Ostrom cautions that you link to those providing accurate information from reputable sources, such as www.aaaai.org, the official Web site of the AAAAI.

"YOUR INPUT IS VERY VALUABLE. WE WANT TO KNOW WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU."

— Dr. Nancy Ostrom, MD, FAAAAI

"This is a medically accurate source of information about allergic diseases and asthma. Doing some homework will enhance the educational dialogue you have with your healthcare providers, including nurses, nurse practitioners, physicians' assistants and physicians," notes Dr. Ostrom.

Keep good records. Record information regarding your child's symptoms, their triggers and what makes them better. Keep a list of treatments used—how your child responds, as well as any possible side effects. Your child's responses might not always be visible to you. Encourage your child to let you know when something doesn't feel right.

Talk as well as listen. Be sure to share the information you're gathering with your doctor. Written lists are helpful. Your care provider uses all of the information you provide to help make decisions that will help you and your child. "Your input is very

valuable, and we want to know what is important to you so we can help support you and your children lead healthy lives," says Dr. Ostrom.

Be proactive. Write down questions you might have before the visit so you can discuss them with your care provider. During the visit, if you don't understand something, ask questions. It is important for you to understand and have input to recommended treatment plans for your child. Let your children know that they can provide information and ask questions as well.

Find a physician you can trust. Many parents have long-standing relationships with their family physicians or pediatricians and trust these doctors to treat their children's allergies. However, if your child isn't doing as well as you'd expect, don't hesitate to ask for a referral to an allergist. An allergist/immunologist is a pediatrician or an internist with at least two years of specialized training to diagnose and treat allergies and asthma. You can also visit www.aaaai.org to find an allergist near you.

Dr. Ostrom, co-director at Allergy and Asthma Medical Group and Research Center in San Diego, CA, feels that patient input to their health care is essential. "We understand that we are here to care for you and your child, and consider that a privilege," she says. "Helping you understand and control your health challenges so that you can live an active life at home, work, school and in your favorite activities is what makes us proud!"

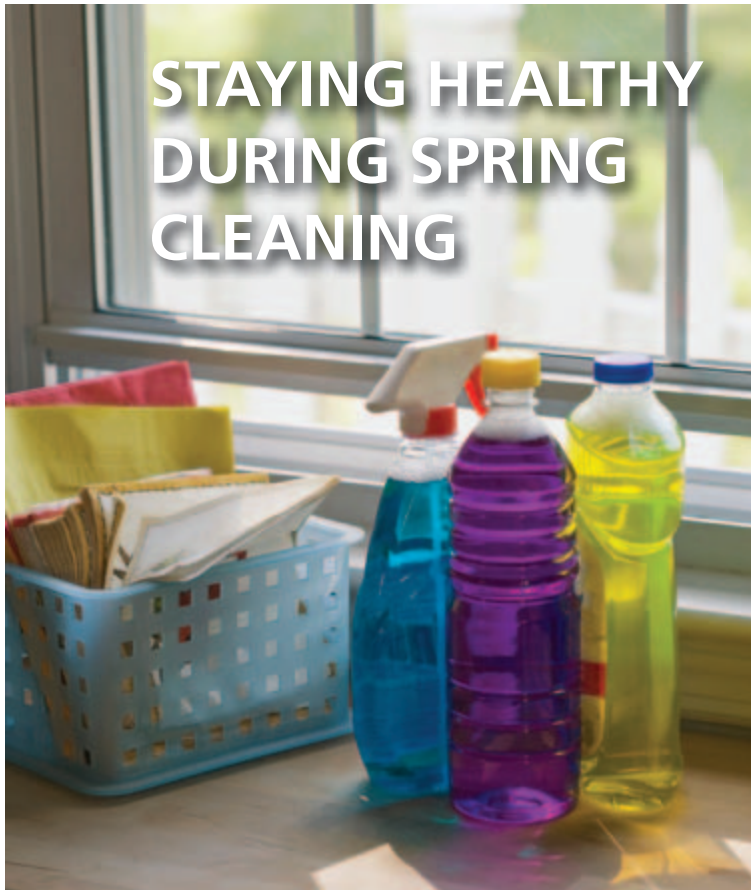
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YOU DESERVE EXPERT CARE

An allergist is a pediatrician or internist with an **extra two years** of specialized training and is the best physician to diagnose and treat allergies and asthma. Find one near you at www.aaaai.org/physref

STAYING HEALTHY DURING SPRING CLEANING



By Jeffrey Demain, MD, FAAAAI

Many people know that regular cleaning can help reduce allergy and asthma triggers in your home (such as mold, pet dander and dust mites). But you may want to pause before you reach for that spray bottle. Some people's asthma and allergies may be aggravated by the way they clean. Harsh chemicals may trigger asthma symptoms or allergies, and dust that is disturbed when cleaning can make the process a nightmare.

So what's the best way to keep your home clean and free of allergy triggers without also aggravating your symptoms? And what kind of cleaning should you do in your home? These simple steps could make a difference and may reduce your risk of developing allergy and asthma symptoms when you clean.

WHAT TO USE

Numerous products have received the "green" seal of approval and are easy on the environment. Many of these are derived from plant or natural

sources rather than harsh chemicals, which can aggravate or create symptoms in people with allergies and asthma. An easy alternative to purchased cleaning products can be cleaners that you make yourself from ordinary household ingredients such as lemon, vinegar and baking soda.

WHERE AND WHAT TO CLEAN

KITCHEN

Often the center of the household, kitchens should be meticulously cleaned and sanitized.

Daily: Wipe down the sink, counters and stove top. Use an exhaust fan to remove cooking fumes and reduce moisture. Sweep or vacuum the floor. Place garbage in a can with an insect-proof lid and empty trash daily.

Weekly: Mop the floor, wipe the cabinets, backsplashes and appliances, clean cabinets and countertops with detergent and water, and check for plumbing leaks. Wipe up excessive moisture in the refrigerator to avoid mold growth. Store food—including pet food—in sealed containers, and discard moldy or out-of-date items. Empty and clean dripping pan and clean or replace moldy rubber seals around doors. Wash the dish rack, and wipe the switch plates, phone and inside of the garbage can.

Seasonally: Empty and scrub down the inside of the refrigerator and the utensil drawers. Scrub down the cupboard exteriors and clean the stove-hood filter.

LIVING AREAS

Clean carpeting weekly with a vacuum cleaner that has a small-particle or HEPA filter. Wash area rugs and floor mats, and mop hard surface flooring weekly. Use curtains made of cotton or synthetic fabric. Wash seasonally.

Keep windows closed and use air conditioning during pollen season. Clean mold and condensation from window frames and sills with a solution of chlorine bleach (3/4 cup chlorine bleach to 1 gallon of water). Always wear a protective mask when cleaning mold.

Encase pillows, mattresses and box springs in dust-mite-proof covers. Wash sheets, pillowcases and blankets weekly in 130 F water. Remove, wash or cover comforters.

Remove anything that collects dust, such as knickknacks and books. Store toys, games and stuffed animals in plastic bins. Keep pets out of the bedroom. (Bathing animals twice a month may reduce allergens.)

Hot, humid houses are breeding grounds for dust mites and mold. Maintain

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About ISSUES

Allergy & Asthma Issues is a free quarterly publication from the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology.

Issues is written and reviewed by medical professionals, but is not intended to replace or constitute medical advice. For specific medical questions, visit an allergist/immunologist. Locate one near you at www.aaaai.org/physref.

For additional patient information on allergies and asthma, visit www.aaaai.org.

Edited by Megan Elliott, AAAAI Communications Manager.

The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology represents allergists, asthma specialists, clinical immunologists, allied health professionals and others with a special interest in the research and treatment of allergic disease. Established in 1943, the AAAAI has nearly 6,500 members in the United States, Canada and 60 other countries.

temperature at 70 F and relative humidity at 30% to 50%. Clean or replace small-particle filters in central heating and cooling systems and in room air conditioners at least once a month.

Control cockroaches and mice with traps from the hardware store, or hire a professional exterminator. To prevent re-infestation, seal cracks or other entryways.

BATHROOM

An exhaust fan can reduce moisture while taking baths or showers. Remove carpeting if possible and use wood or linoleum flooring. Use washable rugs. Remove wallpaper and install tile, or paint walls with mold-resistant enamel paint.

Towel-dry the tub and enclosure after use. Scrub mold from tub and faucets. Clean or replace moldy shower curtains and bathmats. Quickly repair any leaks.

BASEMENT

In older homes, basements can be a challenge. Not only can they be damp and dusty, but they can also harbor rodents or mold. Always wear gloves and a mask when cleaning a basement that has either of these problems. If vacuuming, empty the bag outside, still wearing a mask, and place it directly into a trash bag, tie and put in the trash container immediately.

Remove moldy or water-damaged carpeting. If possible, use cement or linoleum flooring. If that isn't an option, use low-pile instead of high-pile carpeting and use a vacuum cleaner that has a small-particle or HEPA filter weekly. Install plastic sheeting (vapor barrier) under carpeting to prevent moisture seepage.

Check for and repair any sources of leaks or water damage. A dehumidifier can reduce dampness; clean it once a week. Use an exhaust fan to vent moisture from a clothes dryer outside.

MILDEW

You can wash concrete floors and walls with a solution of bleach and water (see above). Allow the solution to sit for five minutes, then rinse and dry. Always wear rubber gloves when working with bleach or vinegar solutions.

If you have a section of carpet with mold or mildew, clean the *back* of the carpet with one part hydrogen peroxide to five parts water. If possible, remove the carpet and place it outside in the sun to dry. If not, prop the section up and use a fan to dry the area.

If you have mold or mildew on basement walls, you can use one of these solutions to clean, but you must also remove the moisture from the area—use a dehumidifier or fans to circulate the air—and open windows if possible.

Cleaning Option 1: Straight vinegar sprayed on the walls! Don't rinse, just air dry.

Cleaning Option 2: Mix 2 cups vinegar, 2 cups very hot water, 1/2 cup salt and 2 cups borax. Apply solution to area and allow it to sit for 30 minutes. Apply the solution again, scrubbing with a soft bristled brush and rinse well with plain water.

Spring is just around the corner—you've got all the tools you need to safely and healthfully clean your house!

Jeffrey Demain, MD, FAACAI, is an allergist/immunologist based in Anchorage, AK.

FACTS ABOUT ASTHMA

- Approximately 34.1 million Americans have been diagnosed with asthma by a health professional during their lifetime.
- The prevalence of asthma increased 75% from 1980–1994.
- Asthma accounts for about 10.1 million missed work days for adults each year.
- In 2006, asthma prevalence was 20.1% higher in African Americans than in whites.

Sources: American Lung Association and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Curious about the difference between food allergies and food intolerance? Not sure what a peak flow meter is? Get answers to these and other questions about allergies and asthma: www.aaaai.org/patients/question-week/



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POLLEN: LITTLE CELLS THAT CAUSE BIG PROBLEMS

By David Shulan, MD, FAAAAI

For people with seasonal allergies, pollen levels can be a useful tool. Yet many don't fully understand what they are and how monitoring pollen levels can help to reduce their symptoms.

WHAT IS POLLEN?

Pollen—the tiny, male cells of flowering plants—can cause itchy or watery eyes, a stuffy, runny nose, allergic eczema and asthma. The pollens that cause the most problems are those that are spread by wind, such as ones from trees, grasses and weeds. These are very light pollens and can blow hundreds of miles from their origin. As a result, you can suffer symptoms caused by pollens that were released hundreds of miles away.

Pollen levels often include these problematic pollens, some of which are from species not found in the local area. Plants with large flowers usually do not cause major allergy symptoms, as they have heavy pollens that drop out of the air quickly.

WHAT DO POLLEN LEVELS MEASURE?

Pollen levels measure airborne allergens. For sensitive individuals, monitoring pollen levels can help limit outdoor exposure at peak pollen times and in turn, reduce their allergy symptoms.

Various concentration levels are associated with the amount of pollen recorded. In general, “absent” means no measurable pollen is recorded. “Low” means that only very sensitive individuals will experience symptoms. “Moderate” means that many more individuals will suffer symptoms. “High” means that most sensitive individuals will suffer some symptoms. “Very high” indicates that all sensitive individuals will suffer symptoms and most will have more severe symptoms.

WHAT AFFECTS POLLEN LEVELS?

Location is one of several factors that can influence pollen levels. A ragweed count of 100 grains/cubic meter would be considered very high in Albany, NY, but only counts in the thousands will raise eyebrows in Iowa City, IA, where they can reach 5,000. Generally, the number of ragweed plants in the Midwest is much higher than in the eastern United States, but ragweed in smaller numbers can be found pollinating in Florida during the spring.

Weather conditions also play a role in pollen levels. Moderate temperatures with low humidity and a gentle breeze keep pollen in the air, whereas rain washes the pollen out. A windless day will result in low levels since pollen needs wind to disperse. High levels of humidity will make the pollen grains heavier, meaning they will drop out of the air more quickly.

CAN ALLERGY SYMPTOMS VARY THROUGHOUT THE SEASON?

Throughout the season, individuals can vary in their level of sensitivity. Many become more sensitive as the season progresses. This process, called allergic priming, means that you may not have problems with low pollen levels at the beginning of the season, but towards the end of the season, low levels may start to cause symptoms.

WHERE CAN I FIND POLLEN LEVELS?

The National Allergy Bureau (NAB) is the section of the AAAAI's Aeroallergen Network responsible for reporting current pollen and mold spore levels to the public.

The NAB provides the most accurate and reliable pollen and mold levels from approximately 78 counting stations throughout the United States, as well as several counting stations in Canada and Argentina. To view the pollen levels for your area, visit www.aaaai.org/nab.

If seasonal allergy symptoms are making you miserable, see an allergist/immunologist. Knowing when you are having symptoms, along with when exposure occurs, can help your allergist/immunologist to use the most effective therapies.

David Shulan, MD, FAAAAI, is an allergist/immunologist based in the Albany, NY, area for nearly 24 years. He's currently in practice with six other board-certified allergists at Certified Allergy and Asthma Consultants and is the director of its NAB-certified pollen counting station.



TIPS TO REMEMBER DURING POLLEN SEASON

Following these tips can reduce exposure to pollen:

Close windows at night to prevent pollens or molds from drifting into your home.

Minimize early morning activity when pollen is usually emitted—between 5 and 10 am.

Keep car windows closed when traveling.

Try to stay indoors when the pollen count or humidity is high, and on windy days when dust and pollen are blown about.

Take a vacation during the height of the pollen season to a more pollen-free area, such as the beach or sea.

Make sure you take any medications prescribed by your allergist/immunologist regularly, in the recommended dosage.

DON'T take more medication than recommended in an attempt to lessen your symptoms.

DON'T mow lawns or be around freshly cut grass; mowing stirs up pollens and molds.

DON'T rake leaves, as this also stirs up molds.

DON'T hang sheets or clothing out to dry. Pollens and molds may collect in them.

DON'T grow too many, or overwater, indoor plants if you are allergic to mold. Wet soil encourages mold growth.

A DREAM VACATION WITH FOOD ALLERGIES? IT'S POSSIBLE

By Andrew W. Murphy, MD, FAAAAI

Whether it's a week at Disney World or a trip to Europe, vacations are a chance to create memories and experience new things. But for families with food allergies, what should be a relaxing break can become a harrowing adventure.

A recent study has shown that families with a food allergic child often limit the number of vacations they take. Many don't travel outside the United States and others avoid certain types of transportation, such as planes and boats. But it isn't necessarily a fear of the unknown that keeps these families close to home. Some say that the availability of medical care is the reason they don't venture too far from home.

PREPARE YOURSELF

What's the secret to successful travel with food allergies? Planning ahead and taking precautions are key. This includes having your autoinjectable epinephrine on hand, requesting special accommodations from airlines and hotels and packing allergen-free snacks.

Remember to always personally carry your medication(s) in their original packaging. Losing your luggage would be an inconvenience; losing your medications could be a medical crisis. Be aware of the locations of hospitals near your destination and get the contact information for local medical professionals. Pack extra copies of medical documentation, so you'll have this information on hand in the event of an emergency.

TRAVELING ABROAD

If you're traveling to a foreign country, consider carrying a card that explains in the local language what foods you can't eat. Show this to your server, and if possible the chef, at any restaurant you visit. You can also research regional cuisines in order to get an idea of the dishes you'll want to avoid. If possible, learn the word for your allergen in the language of the country you're visiting and be able to recognize it on food packaging. However, be aware that food labeling laws in other countries may not be the same as those in the United States. Don't be afraid to ask questions, and when in doubt, just say no.

BEFORE YOU TRAVEL

If you or your child has food allergies, you can also follow these steps to avoid reactions.

- If you're traveling by airplane, try to keep all medications in their original packaging to make the screening process easier.
- Anticipate problems and hidden allergens. Does your host know about your child's food allergies? Does the airline you're flying serve peanuts as a snack? Do your relatives have pets that could make your child's other allergies worse?
- Make an appointment with your allergist before you travel to discuss specific precautions you can take while traveling. Always continue to take your medications on schedule.
- Know who to call in the area you're visiting if you have an emergency and need to make an appointment, and keep your allergist's phone number or other emergency contact information on-hand.

Andrew W. Murphy, MD, FAAAAI, is an allergist/immunologist based in Downingtown, PA, and a member of the Teaching Faculty at A.I. duPont Hospital for Children.



PLACES FAMILIES WITH FOOD ALLERGIES ARE LEAST LIKELY TO VISIT*

- Japan
- India
- China
- Africa
- Beach resorts in foreign countries

**According to a survey by researchers from the Mount Sinai School of Medicine and the Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network*