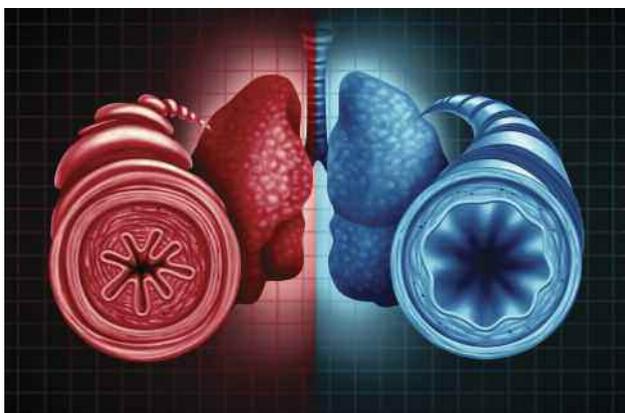


Just Breathe: Asthma Relief Is Possible

By Heather Bremner Claverie



SPRING IS coming, but for now, cold weather and its associated illnesses still linger, causing the more than 26 million Americans who suffer from asthma an influx of incidents. Seasonal cold, dry air, in addition to the abundance of circulating sinus and upper respiratory infections, can be a troublesome mix for asthmatic lungs and increase asthma symptoms. In the U.S., the number of individuals diagnosed with this medical condition is growing, making it one of the nation's most common and costliest diseases, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Identifying Different Types of Asthma

Asthma occurs when the airways become inflamed, restricting the ability to breathe. The three most common types of asthma, all of which cause shortness of breath, include exercise-induced, nocturnal and allergic.

Originally labelled exercise-induced asthma, this type is now referred to as exercise-induced bronchoconstriction, since exercise itself does not directly cause asthma. Coughing, wheezing, chest tightness and shortness of breath are the most common symptoms.

All asthma sufferers also experience nocturnal asthma. As the name implies, symptoms include sleepless nights filled with coughing, wheezing or chest pains. Nocturnal asthma requires a more effective long-term treatment.

Airborne allergens — from dust mites and pet dander to pollen, mold or pollution — are the most common triggers of allergic asthma. When these elements are inhaled by

someone with an allergy, the body's shields are alerted leading to wheezing, coughing and other asthma-related symptoms. Individuals who suffer from allergic asthma should see an allergist or immunologist to decipher what is triggering the attacks.

Managing Asthma

Although there is no cure for asthma, there are ways to manage it. The best route is to identify and avoid triggers, take medications to prevent further symptoms and have a plan in place for future asthma attacks. In addition, identifying the type of asthma a patient suffers from will help physicians determine the best treatment.

For those who suffer worse symptoms depending on the season, it's possible a more natural approach could be effective. This could include eye drops and nasal decongestants such as a saline nasal rinse to flush out molds and allergens.

Now or Later: How to Treat Asthma

There are two types of asthma medications: long-term and quick relievers.

Long-term medicines, which come in pill and inhaler forms, are needed daily. The most common forms are inhalers and nebulizers because both send medications directly into the lungs. Nebulizers change the medication from a liquid to a mist and are often used in infants and small children who have a difficult time using inhalers.

Since asthma can strike at any time, quick-relief medications that help relax muscles and open the airways when a sudden attack occurs may also be needed.

Breathe Easier

Breathing is a bodily function few think about daily; it just comes naturally. But for the population that suffers from asthma, the ability to inhale and exhale can be stifled at any moment. Thankfully, a variety of treatment options are available to help asthma sufferers breathe and rest a little easier. ■

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Hop To It

Filters can prevent some pollutants from entering living spaces, but pet dander and dust mites can be produced inside the home. An effective air cleaning device such as the Rabbit Air Minus A2 Air Purifier can help trap and remove these. In addition, the air purifier monitors ozone levels and has wireless capabilities. It can be hung on the wall and outfitted with a customized panel with images ranging from Vincent Van Gogh and Claude Monet or Peanuts' Snoopy and Hello Kitty for the younger crowd. Starting at \$549.95;

Rabbitair.com

Move Over Asthma

Asthma is the leading chronic illness in children. Since young children have a difficult time using inhalers, nebulizers can help open their airways. The Mabis Margo Moo Compressor Nebulizer helps calm and entertain children while also treating their asthma. It comes with a cute barn-shaped docking station and a handle for easy transport. \$64.99;

natlallergy.com



Shopping Guide to Asthma Products



Cleaning Day

Scents, perfumes and dyes in many commercial household cleaners can flare up respiratory issues. And when asthma is an issue, it's necessary to clean often. Bona Free and Simple Hardwood Floor Cleaner is free of dyes and will effectively help keep dust at bay. Starting at \$9.99;

Amazon.com

Over-the-Counter Care



Some natural or homeopathic medications can help with respiratory issues or asthma. One product that works well to clear sinuses is Simply Saline Nasal Relief Spray by Arm & Hammer. This product naturally softens mucus so it drains easier and helps breathing easier. This spray is drug-free and is safe to use with prescription medications.

\$7.26; Target.com



Inhalers

Anti-inflammatory drugs such as inhaled steroids, which are by prescription only, can help provide long- and short-term relief from asthma by helping to reduce swelling and mucus. Flovent HFA contains a medicine called fluticasone propionate, a synthetic corticosteroid (corticosteroids are natural substances found in the body that help fight inflammation). When inhaled regularly, it can help prevent asthma symptoms. It can be used by patients 4 years and older.

www.flovent.com/about-flovent-hfa/index.html

Filter It Out

Mold spores, dust, pollen and viruses can trigger attacks in asthmatic individuals. Ensuring air filters are certified allergy and asthma friendly, according to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, is a good way to make sure they will adequately remove pollutants from the air. Filters should be changed every 30 to 60 days. The Filtrete Elite Allergen Reduction Healthy Living 2200 filter will attract and capture large particulates, making the air safer. \$44.73/two pack; Amazon.com

