

Don't let asthma keep you indoors this summer

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Heat and humidity during long summer days can take its toll and cause us to slow down. For asthmatics, summer weather can make the outdoors feel like a danger zone for breathing.

On high pollution days, the Air Quality Index (AQI) is poor and for asthmatics that can mean an increase in medication use, a visit to the emergency room, hospitalization and sometimes even death. Outdoor air pollution consists of a mixture of gases and particulate from industrial manufacturing and the burning of fossil fuels in motor vehicles. Health Canada estimates that air pollution is responsible for 5,900 premature deaths each year.

The outdoors harbors other asthma triggers such as grass and pollen that inflame the airway and can lead to coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath and chest tightness. On days when the AQI is moderate to high, doctors and respiratory therapists suggest people with respiratory problems remain in an air conditioned environment.

While asthma sufferers can't control the heat and the humidity of summer they can take personal responsibility for reducing indoor pollutants inside their homes and workplaces.

A certified asthma educator can provide guidance on how to reduce exposure to second-hand smoke, house dust mites, mould and animal dander.

Individuals can manage their asthma by making a few lifestyle changes and taking regular controller medications.

Asthmatics who need to take their bronchodilator (blue puffer) more than three times a week have poorly controlled asthma and need to see their doctor.

The best way to measure the level of asthma control is to do a quick and easy breathing test called spirometry — ask your doctor about this test.

What You Can Do

If the summer time brings out the 'worst' in your asthma, carefully monitor your symptoms and follow these tips to stay active.

Choose indoor activities on days when the AQI is poor, particularly on humid or windy days.

Make sure you have access to your reliever inhaler (puffer) at all times. If you need it, take it.

Never start exercise if you have asthma symptoms (cough, shortness of breath, wheeze).

If you are having any breathing difficulty with physical exercise, this means your asthma is poorly controlled. Talk to your doctor.

Asthma rates are continuing to climb and the data on activity restriction, and emergency room visits suggest that many people with asthma need help controlling their disease.

If you want to take control of your asthma symptoms this summer talk to your doctor about completing an asthma action plan that will help you manage your symptoms and enjoy your summer.

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