



Feature Column

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Keeping Your Hometown Healthy

Know Your Asthma Triggers

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Although it is impossible to live without, breathing is one of the things that most of us take for granted. For most, it is usually painless and trouble-free. However, for individuals with asthma—a chronic inflammatory condition of the lungs—breathing can be painful and difficult.

The airways of asthma patients are very sensitive and may also be narrow or blocked. When exposed to certain triggers, the airways tend to overreact and become even more inflamed and constricted. As air is forced through irritated and swollen airways, some people with asthma develop an audible wheeze, shortness of breath, chest pain and, often, coughing. According to the American Lung Association of Arkansas, common triggers include the following:

- respiratory infections and colds
- allergic reactions to pollen, mold, dust, animal dander, insect droppings (especially roaches) and feathers
- foods, including nuts, shellfish, peanut butter, eggs and food additives such as monosodium glutamate and sulfite preservatives (These cause reactions

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in a relatively small number of asthma patients.)

- cigarette smoke
- vigorous exercise
- some indoor and outdoor pollutants
- exposure to cold air or sudden temperature change
- excitement or stress

If you know your asthma triggers, you can take steps to prevent a return asthma attack.

Some asthma episodes can be mild and last for only a few minutes. However, some attacks can be so severe that the patient gasps for air and chokes as the airways become restricted, inflamed and congested. These episodes can happen suddenly and can be fatal.

Asthma can develop at any age, and close relatives of people with asthma are more likely to be affected by it. Children, ethnic minorities and people living in urban environments seem to be at the greatest risk for asthma.

According to the American Lung Association, almost 35,000 children and more than 125,000 adults in Arkansas suffer from asthma.

Nationally, 26 million Americans have been diagnosed with asthma in their lifetime. Of these 26 million Americans, 10.6 million have had an asthma attack in the past 12 months. Over eight million of those diagnosed are under the age of 18 years.

Asthma cannot be cured; however, it is a manageable disease. With emphasis placed on preventive treatment plans (knowing your triggers), doctors can help patients reduce or avoid asthma attacks. This may include medications that can be inhaled, fluids to help clear airways, anti-inflammatory drugs and allergen injections to make patients less sensitive.

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For more information about asthma, call your doctor or the American Lung Association of Arkansas (501) 224-5864 or 1-800-586-4872.

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