Everyone needs clean air to breathe, and that’s doubly important for people with asthma.

If you have asthma or another lung disease, your lungs may be sensitive to air pollution or even sudden weather changes. This can include an inversion—a weather event that can dirty the air you breathe for days.

ABOUT INVERSION

An inversion happens when a layer of warmer air traps cooler air below it. The lower level of air tends to hold in pollution.

Inversions can be common in mountain valleys, especially in winter. But air pollution can occur at any time of year, such as in summer when wildfires are raging in certain parts of the country.

Ozone gas, another kind of air pollution, can also trigger asthma flares. Ozone is more common in summer and in smoggy cities.

BETTER BREATHING

If you have asthma, air pollution can be more bothersome to you. You might notice more wheezing, coughing, chest tightness, and other symptoms if the air around you is bad.

Here are a few things you can do to protect yourself:

> **Know before you go** – If possible, limit or avoid outdoor activities on days when air quality is poor. Watch local weather reports to find out when more pollution is in the air. Or check your air quality online at [airnow.gov](http://airnow.gov).

> **Talk about the weather** – Ask your doctor what you need to do if air quality is bad. For example, in addition to staying indoors and avoiding outdoor exercise, should you adjust your medicine? This information should be part of an asthma action plan that you and your doctor create.

> **Don’t ignore indoor air** – When outdoor air is dirty, don’t forget to close doors and windows at home and in the car. Run the air conditioner if you need to cool down. Install and maintain clean air filters in your home’s heating system.

Sources: Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

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Finding Mental Healthcare: Know Your Options

Asthma doesn’t just make it hard to breathe. Like any chronic illness, asthma can be hard on your emotional well-being.

Your mental health is just as important as your physical health. If you think you may need help with a mental health issue, don’t hesitate to ask.

WHERE TO FIND HELP

Take these steps to get the mental healthcare you need:

> **Talk to your doctor** – Talk to your doctor to find out if your symptoms may be due to a mental health condition or some other illness. Your doctor may choose to refer you to a counselor or therapist. You can talk to these mental health professionals about difficult emotions, thoughts, or behaviors. Some of these specialists can even prescribe medicine, if needed.

> **Call your insurance plan** – Another way to get help is to call Member Services. Ask for a list of mental health providers in your plan’s network. Also find out what your plan covers.

> **Contact Mental Health America (mentalhealthamerica.net)** – This organization has offices in many parts of the country. They may be able to help you find a mental health provider in your area, as well as community resources and support groups. Visit the “Find an Affiliate” section of their website and use the search box to enter your location.

> **The right fit** – When you first meet with a mental health provider, try to get a sense of how well you think you can work with this person. It’s important to feel comfortable with whomever you choose to help you. The better you work together, the more likely you’ll feel better sooner.

*Sources: Mental Health America; National Alliance on Mental Illness*
Make an Asthma Action Plan

Asthma has a variety of symptoms: coughing, wheezing, chest tightness, shortness of breath. But there’s one thing it shouldn’t make you feel: powerless.

In fact, there’s a lot you can do to keep asthma symptoms from flaring up. Your physician can work with you to develop a plan that will help keep your asthma under control so you can live a healthy, active life.

Find your triggers – These are irritants and allergens that cause your asthma symptoms. Triggers vary from person to person but may include:

- dust
- animal dander
- tobacco smoke
- mold
- pollen
- polluted air
- chemicals from products, such as hair spray
- pollen
- mold

Your doctor can give you advice on how to reduce your exposure to triggers.

Keep symptoms in check – The next step is to faithfully take the medicines that help prevent and control your asthma symptoms. Most people with asthma use both long-term and fast-relief medicines.

- Long-term medicines help keep the airways open and can prevent asthma symptoms from flaring up. They come in both inhaled and pill form and should be used daily as advised by your doctor.
- Fast-relief medicines can help control asthma symptoms when they occur. You should carry a quick-relief inhaler throughout the day and use it as directed.

Your doctor also may recommend using a peak flow meter. When you blow into the device, it displays a number that shows how well your lungs are working. Your doctor will help you determine your personal best peak flow number. When your peak flow meter shows this number, your asthma is under control.

Prepare for emergencies – You’ll also need to know what to do if you have a serious asthma attack. You should call your doctor if:

- Your medicines don’t provide relief.
- Your peak flow number is less than half of your personal best.

And call 911 if:

- You have trouble walking or talking because you’re out of breath.
- Your lips or fingernails are blue.

Your doctor can give you further advice on what to do in an asthma emergency.

Check with the experts – See your doctor regularly to make sure your asthma plan is working well. These visits are also a good time for you to voice any questions or concerns about your asthma treatment.

Call your doctor if you’d like to learn more about keeping asthma under control.

Sources: American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
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