

CINCINNATI ALLERGY & ASTHMA CENTER

TRIGGERS OF ASTHMA

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ALLERGY AND IMMUNOLOGY

ALLERGENS

Allergens are an important triggering factor. Examples of allergens are:

1. Pollens - trees, grass, ragweed, weeds
2. Mold
3. Animal dander - cats, dogs, mites, cockroaches, guinea pigs, gerbils, hamster
4. House dust
5. Certain foods - such as milk, wheat, and eggs
6. Flowers
7. Additives/preservatives - Monosodium Glutamate (MSG) and sulfites (some foods containing sulfites are lettuce, precut fruit, white grapes, maraschino cherries, fresh mushrooms, wet-milled corn, dehydrated potatoes, guacamole shrimp, conditioned dough, beets, sugar, wine)

VIRAL INFECTIONS

Viral infections of the respiratory tract also often act as a major aggravating trigger. This added irritation of the airways often precedes attacks of asthma. The exact biological mechanism for this is not known. Examples of viral infections are:

1. Colds
2. Pneumonia
3. Bronchitis
4. Infections of the throat, sinus, and lungs

IRRITANTS

Irritants can play a large role in triggering asthma. Industrial or occupational exposure to chemical irritants study indicate that 15% of all male cases in Japan result from exposure to industrial vapors, dust, gases, or fumes. Examples of irritants are:

1. Smoke - cigarette smoke and smoke from wood stove
2. Strong odors - such as perfumes and hair spray
3. Other chemicals - such as cleaning fluids and paint fumes
4. Air pollutants - such as coal and chalk dust
5. Changing weather conditions - including changes in temperature (cold air), humidity, barometric pressure, and strong winds.
6. Physical actions/activities - including coughing, yelling, laughing, and vacuuming (raises dust)

EXERCISE/DISTANCE RUNNING

Distance running can also bring on an asthma attack. It has been estimated that 85% of allergic asthmatics have symptoms of wheezing following exercise (including riding bike, long distance running, and jumping rope) is most likely to induce asthma, particularly in cold climates.

SENSITIVITY TO DRUGS

Asthmatics should not take any medications unless prescribed by a physician. Some examples of possible sensitive drugs are:

1. Aspirin
2. Non-steroidal anti inflammatory drugs - such as Motrin, Advil, Naprosyn, Day Pro, Indocin, Indomethacin, Naproxen
3. High blood pressure, angina, or migraine headache medications
4. Betablockers - such as Lopressor, Corgard, Inderal, Tenormin
5. Glaucoma using betablocker - Betoptic or Timoptic
6. Ibuprofen

EMOTIONAL ANXIETY

Emotional anxiety and nervous stress cause fatigue which may be responsible for worsening the asthmatic's symptoms and precipitating an attack. However, stress is really only a secondary factor of a disease that is primarily allergic in nature. These psychological factors alone cannot provoke asthma and are more an effect than a cause.

Just as the power of suggestion is more powerful in some people than others, it is important to remember that asthmatics differ with respect to the causes of their attacks. They also respond differently to medication and the amount of medication necessary to control the disease.