

# Environmental Tips

There are many things called irritants in the environment that may make breathing more difficult for persons with lung problems. Some of these breathing hazards can be avoided and some cannot. Being aware of the various hazards may help you avoid these conditions or at least limit your exposure to them.

## Cigarettes

Cigarette smoking irritates the lining in your lungs. This causes mucus cells to produce more mucus, which may plug your lungs. In time, this leads to infection and may cause permanent lung damage. Emphysema and Bronchitis are largely diseases of smokers. Smokers who have emphysema and bronchitis cannot get better until they stop smoking. No matter how long you have smoked, coughing and sputum may decrease when you quit.



## Pollution

Be sure to pay attention to air pollution alerts. If the pollution count is high (90 - 100), stay inside to limit exposure to your lungs. The worst

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pollution, and the one you can do something about, is cigarette smoke. Ask your family and friends not to smoke around you.

## **Aerosol Sprays**

Aerosol sprays pollute your home. These include room fresheners, deodorants and oven cleaners. You cannot avoid breathing in sprayed products that may linger in the air. Breathing these products in is irritating to your lungs. Substitute every aerosol spray in your home for products, which can be poured or rubbed.

## **Fumes**

Avoid strong fumes that may irritate your lungs. Ventilate your cooking stove by turning on the exhaust fan or opening a nearby window to draw the cooking fumes out of the house.

## **Humidity**

If you live in a very humid area and have mildew or mold in the house, you may want to dehumidify your house. Air conditioning will do this or you can use a dehumidifier. If your house is too dry, it can dry out the mucus linings of your airways. You can use a humidifier to add moisture to the air. Sometimes simply setting pans of water on heating ducts or radiators can do this. A vaporizer is **not** recommended.

## **Dust**

Avoid activities that raise dust, such as sweeping, dusting, driving on dirt roads and mowing grass. If you must get involved in a dusty job, wear a scarf or handkerchief over your nose and mouth or buy a surgical mask to wear. This helps to filter the air that you breathe. Also, regular cleaning of filters in air conditioning and heaters is important.

## **Extremely Cold Weather**

Cold air can irritate the bronchial tubes and cause coughing. When you go outdoors in very cold weather (less than 40 degrees F), breathe through a scarf or handkerchief held over your nose. This will warm the air as it enters your lungs.



- **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: [health-info@osu.edu](mailto:health-info@osu.edu).**