

Better Breathing

The average adult breathes in about fifteen times a minute—a child, even more often. For adults, that is approximately 600 breaths an hour, or over 12,000 breaths a day. Though most of us never give breathing a second thought, except for perhaps being glad we are able to do it, if you suffer from asthma or air born allergies, you already know the importance of breathing good, clean air. Think of it this way; you are breathing in 22, 000 pints of air on a daily basis. Besides oxygen, you are also getting a hefty dose of pollen, mold spores, dust, chemical fumes, and a myriad of other foreign elements.

One of our children has had asthma since she was a baby. Thankfully hers is reasonably manageable, and things are much easier now that she is old enough to let us know warning signs when her asthma flares up. But still, asthma is a scary business. One of the most common chronic diseases, asthma is a condition in which the lungs become chronically inflamed. As a result of the inflammation, the lungs are hypersensitive to internal and external factors—things like mold, dust, animal dander, foods and food additives, wood smoke, cold air, and many more. Even stress could trigger an attack.

In dealing with our daughter's asthma, we have tried many different medications and experimented with numerous suggestions in helping lessen the severity of the asthma attacks. Here are some tips that have worked for us and hopefully will help you or your loved one in your quest for better breathing.

- Most importantly, create a safe environment. Purchase an air cleaner, or if your budget allows, research one that filters the air throughout your entire home. Definitely run an air cleaner constantly in the bedroom of the asthmatic. Change filters according to manufacturers instructions.

- In the bedroom of the asthmatic, replace old carpet (anything older than 8 years), or better yet, opt for no carpet at all. When we replaced our daughter's bedroom carpet, we noticed dramatic results in how much better she slept at night.
- For children, insist on only one or two stuffed animals on their beds. Wash the stuffed animals weekly in hot water.
- Encase mattresses and pillows with special hypoallergenic coverings. Wash all bedding weekly in hot water—including all sheets, pillowcases, and blankets.
- Use 100% cotton sheets and blankets.
- Prohibit smoking in your home! Study after study shows that children in homes with smokers are far more likely to suffer from asthma attacks.
- Replace draperies with shutters or blinds. Clean with damp cloth frequently to prevent dust from building up.
- Clean books, furniture, etc. with damp cloth—and do so when the asthmatic is not in the room.
- Vacuum frequently—preferably with a vacuum cleaner that contains a HEPA filter.
- Clean air ducts and keep them clean.
- Use special air filters in your home—they are worth the extra money.
- Find a doctor with whom you feel comfortable asking questions and also one who listens to you and your concerns.
- Keep an asthma journal. Record things such as when the asthma is worse (morning, evening, after exercise, etc), what you eat, what your activities are, and what your symptoms are. This can be very helpful in helping you determine what your asthma triggers are.
- Use a Peak Flow Meter. Kids over 5 or 6 years of age and adults can measure the force with which they exhale. Monitor your condition and/or progress. Record results in the asthma journal.

- If your child has asthma, keep the lines of communication open with your child's school. Have a plan with the school nurse as well as your child's teacher. Make a list of red flag symptoms for your child's teacher (especially if your child is very young) and the plan of action.

Though there is no cure for asthma, you can manage the condition. Remember, knowledge is power.