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# Chronic Lung Disease: Avoiding Irritants and Allergens

Chronic lung disease may include COPD, which is chronic bronchitis and emphysema. It may also include pulmonary fibrosis, sarcoidosis, and other long-term respiratory conditions. Many people with chronic lung disease need to stay away from irritants that can trigger symptoms. These symptoms makes it harder to breathe. Irritants are certain substances in the air that irritate the airways. Some people are also sensitive to certain allergens. These are substances that cause swelling (inflammation) in the lungs. Allergens can also cause a runny nose or itchy, watery eyes. You likely can't stay away from all these things, all the time. But you'll most likely breathe better if you stay away from the things that bother you.

## Try to stay away from...

**Smoke.** This includes cigarettes, cigars, pipes, and fireplaces. If you smoke, quit. Smoking is the main cause of COPD. Quitting will help you be able to better manage your condition.

- Don't smoke and stay away from secondhand smoke. And don't let others smoke near you or in your home.
- Don't use e-cigarettes or vaping products, because they have harmful side effects.
- Ask for smoke-free hotel rooms and rental cars.
- Make sure fireplaces and wood stoves are well ventilated. And sit well away from them.

**Smog.** This is made up of car exhaust and other air pollutants.

- Check local air quality reports. These let you know when air quality is poor.
- Stay indoors as much as you can on smoggy days.
- Avoid outdoor pollution such as dusts, vapors, fumes, gases, and other chemicals.

**Strong odors .** These include scented room fresheners, mothballs, and insect sprays. Perfume and cooking can also cause strong odors.

- Don't use bleach or ammonia for cleaning.
- Use scent-free deodorant, lotion, and other products.
- Stay away from indoor pollution such as burning wood, smoke from home cooking, or heating fuels.

**Other irritants .** These include dust, aerosol sprays, and fine powders.

- Wear a mask while doing tasks such as dusting, sweeping, and yard work.

**Cold weather.** This can make it harder to breathe.

- Protect your lungs by wearing a scarf over your nose and mouth.

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## You may also need to stay away from...

If you have allergies, try to stay away from the allergens that cause them. If you are allergic to many things, think about being tested for specific allergens. Ask your healthcare provider if you need to stay away from any of these:

**Pollen.** This is a fine powder made by trees, grasses, and weeds.

- Try to learn what types of pollen affect you the most. Pollen levels change during the year.
- Don't do outdoor activities when pollen levels are high. Use air conditioning. Don't open the windows in your home and car.

**Animal dander.** This is shed by animals with fur or feathers. The particles can float through the air. They stick to carpet, clothing, and furniture.

- Wash your hands and clothes after handling pets.

**Dust mites** . These are tiny bugs too small to see. They live in mattresses, bedding, carpets, curtains, and indoor dust.

- Wash bedding in hot water (130°F/54.4°C) each week.
- Cover mattresses and pillows with special mite-proof cases.

**Mold.** This grows in damp places such as bathrooms, basements, and closets.

- Use an exhaust fan while bathing. Or leave a window open in the bathroom.
- Use a dehumidifier in damp places.

## Call 911

Call 911 if you have a severe reaction such as:

- Vomiting
- Coughing
- Diarrhea
- Hives
- Swelling
- Tongue swelling
- Throat closing
- Wheezing
- Problems breathing
- Can't talk
- Chest tightness

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- Feeling faint
  - A sense or feeling of doom

Ask your healthcare provider or an allergy specialist to test you for specific antigens. This can help prevent severe reactions.