

Aetna Health ConnectionsSM

Wellness Resources

Asthma, allergy and influenza. You're in control to decrease your risk and manage your health.

Reduce your risk of asthma attacks and allergies by avoiding triggers

Asthma and allergies can be made worse by being around certain triggers, or things that cause an attack. Some asthma triggers include:

- Allergen exposure which might include coming into contact with animal dander, dust mites and pollen.
- Irritants, such as cigarette smoke, pollution, cold air, scented products, stress or strong emotions (like crying or laughing hard).
- Exercise, medicines like aspirin, or beverages such as wine.

Allergy triggers include:

- Allergen exposure.
- Medicines such as penicillin, anti-seizure medicine, insulin and local anesthetics.
- Certain foods such as eggs, peanuts, wheat and shellfish.

A severe reaction is called anaphylaxis, and it can be deadly. If you've had an anaphylactic reaction, you should wear a Medic-Alert bracelet or necklace indicating your allergy. Talk with your doctor about this.



Asthma, allergies and the flu are conditions that affect the upper respiratory tract and how we breathe. Asthma and other allergic diseases can strike anyone regardless of age, gender, race or socioeconomic factors. However, more women than men have asthma. An estimated 10 to 20 percent of all Americans get the flu each year.¹

By learning more about asthma, allergies and the flu, you can decrease your risk and better manage your health

Asthma and allergies are closely linked, and the flu can make asthma worse.

- **Asthma** is a disease that causes the airways to narrow when irritated, such as during exposure to pollen or smoke. When irritated, more mucous is produced, reducing the amount of air flow to the lungs, and making it hard to breathe. This is called an asthma attack.
- **Allergies** occur when the body reacts to usually harmless substances, such as dust mites, molds and certain foods. The body tries to defend itself from these allergens by attacking them, sometimes resulting in life-threatening symptoms.
- **Influenza**, or the flu, is a contagious upper respiratory infection caused by viruses. It is usually spread through respiratory droplets from a cough or sneeze. The best way to prevent the flu, especially for those at high risk, is to get vaccinated each fall.

You can manage and treat asthma and allergies

Avoid anything that triggers your attacks and ask your doctor about medicines that can control symptoms and treat the condition. Reduce your exposure to household allergens by using allergy-free covers in the bedroom, keeping floors clean, reducing dust, getting rid of insects and mice, and avoiding cigarette smoke.

Symptoms of the flu differ from those of a cold

Cold and flu are caused by different viruses, but it may be difficult to tell the two apart. The following chart compares some of these symptoms.²

Symptoms	Common Cold	Flu
Fever	Rare	Yes, usually between 102 – 104 degrees, lasts 3 – 4 days
Headache	Rare	Yes
General aches pains	Slight	Yes, usually severe
Fatigue or weakness	Quite mild	Can last up to 2 – 3 weeks
Extreme exhaustion	Never	Yes, early and prominent
Stuffy nose	Common	Sometimes
Sneezing	Yes	Sometimes
Sore throat	Common	Sometimes
Chest discomfort, cough	Mild to moderate; hacking cough	Common; can become severe

Getting a flu vaccine is the best way to prevent the flu, especially for high-risk individuals, including pregnant women, people over age 65 and those with chronic diseases.

You can also prevent the flu or stop the spread of it by:

- Avoiding contact with people who are sick.
- Covering your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Washing your hands.

¹National Institutes of Health, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Diseases and Conditions Index: Asthma. Available at: www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Asthma/Asthma_All.html. Accessed March 29, 2006.

²National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Is It a Cold or the Flu? Available at: www.niaid.nih.gov/publications/cold/sick.pdf. Accessed March 29, 2006

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Remember: You are in control of your health. Develop a plan, and move toward a healthier future today!

For more information about women's health, please visit <http://womenshealth.aetna.com>.