

Clean indoor air can help reduce asthma attacks

Did you know that, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 25 million Americans, including roughly seven million children, have asthma? It's true, and those numbers have steadily risen in recent years.

Asthma is more than occasional wheezing or feeling out of breath during physical activity. Asthma is chronic and can lead to coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath, fast breathing, and chest tightness, states the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. In the 21st century, people spend significant time indoors at home, school or work, and indoor air environments could be triggers for asthma. Improving indoor air quality can help people breathe clearly. The AAFA notes that the following agents can adversely affect indoor air quality, potentially triggering asthma attacks.

Allergens

Allergens such as mold, dust mites, pet dander and fur, and waste from insects or rodents thrive in many homes. Ensuring indoor air quality is high can cut back on the amount of allergens in the air. People with asthma can invest in an air purifier and vacuum regularly, being sure to use a HEPA-equipped appliance. Routinely replacing HVAC system filters can help prevent allergens from blowing around the house. Also, frequent maintenance of HVAC systems will ensure they are operating safely and not contributing to poor indoor air quality.

Mold can be mitigated by reducing moisture in a home. Moist environments in the kitchen and bathroom may promote mold growth. Ventilation is key to keep mold at bay.

Tobacco smoke

Thirdhand smoke, or THS, may be unfamiliar to many people. A 2011 report published

in Environmental Health Perspectives says THS is an invisible combination of gases and particles that can cling to clothing, cushions, carpeting, and other materials long after secondhand smoke has cleared from a room. Studies have indicated that residual nicotine levels can be found in house dust where people smoke or once smoked. Studies have indicated that smoke compounds can adsorb onto surfaces and then desorb back into air over time.

Keeping tobacco smoke out of a home can improve indoor air quality and personal health.

VOCs

Volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, are gases released from commonly used products. These can include paints and varnishes, cleaning supplies, air fresheners, new furniture, and new carpet. People with asthma may find that VOCs

can trigger attacks. Airing out items, reducing usage of products that are heavily scented and choosing low- or no-VOC products can help. Making cleaning products

Research has not demonstrated the effectiveness of any chemical additives or sealants placed in or on ducts for the prevention of bacteria growth or inhibition of dust formation. It is advisable to steer clear of companies that try to push additional services or chemical applications that actually may hinder health more than dust.

An untrained person can actually damage the ducts or

from baking soda, vinegar and liquid oil soap also can keep indoor air quality high.

Homeowners who plan to renovate their homes can consider using the appropriate specifications for HVAC systems to promote good indoor air, as well as address any other potential problems that may be compromising indoor air quality.

heating and cooling system. That is why it is important to do your research. A properly done job should include cleaning all of the components of the system, including coils and condenser parts of the HVAC system itself. The job should take between 3 and 8 hours and will range in cost from \$450 to \$1,000, according to EPA estimates. The "blow and go" specials advertised for \$100 are likely a waste of money and may inadvertently cause damage or dislodge dust inappropriately.

The NADCA says the most effective way to clean air ducts and ventilation systems is to employ "source re-

moval" methods of cleaning. This requires a contractor to place the system under negative pressure through the use of a specialized, powerful vacuum. While the vacuum draws air through the system, devices are inserted into the ducts to dislodge any debris that might be stuck to interior surfaces. The debris can then travel down the ducts to the vacuum, which removes it from the system and the home.

Although there are no proven health benefits, air duct cleaning can help improve indoor air quality and may help an HVAC system operate more efficiently.

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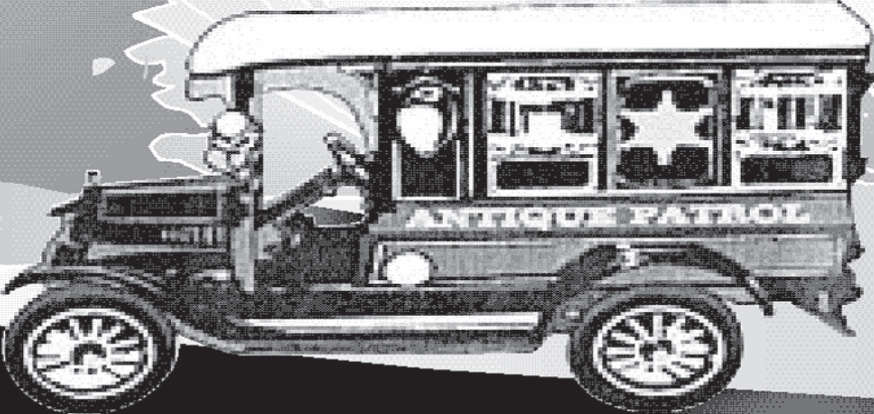
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