Navigating the Holidays with Allergies & Asthma

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Lorene Alba, AE-C

The mission of ALLERGY & ASTHMA NETWORK is to end the needless death and suffering due to asthma, allergies and related conditions through outreach, education, advocacy and research.
Meet Our Speakers

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Food Allergy and Chronic Disease Management Chef and Blogger
Contributor, Asthma.net & Allergies.net

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Education Specialist, Allergy & Asthma Network
Asthma Blogger, Food Allergy Mom
Contributor, Asthma.net & Allergies.net

Today’s Program

- Managing Stress as a Trigger
- The Scent of the Season
- Where to stay
- Managing Environmental Triggers
- How to Pack for a Successful Holiday
How much does your stress level increase over the holidays?

Managing stress as an asthma trigger
Your mental picture of the holidays . . .

Perfectly decorated tree
Sharing family traditions
Picture perfect dinners
Togetherness

And the reality . . .

Big messes to clean
Lost luggage
Family disagreements
Catch a virus
Burned the dessert
WHAT IS STRESS?

How we REACT when we feel under pressure or threatened

Being in a situation that we don't feel we can manage or control

We can have stress when we have lots of responsibilities that we are struggling to manage

Sound like the holidays?!

The stressor is not what causes us to feel the physical symptoms of stress. It’s our reaction to what is happening that causes the symptoms.

Stress is simply wishing our current situation was different. Accepting the situation for what it is can help reduce the physical symptoms of stress.

Take a moment to breathe in and out deeply. Put your hand on your heart and remind yourself that you are okay.
How does stress affect asthma?

- **Stress increases**
  - Stress levels tend to increase – sometimes very quickly!

- **Chemical release**
  - Makes the muscles around the airways tighten – causing difficulty breathing

- **Can weaken immune system**
  - More likely to come down with a cold, flu or pneumonia or have an asthma episode

What causes holiday stress?

- **Family**
  - Family issues become exaggerated
- **Travel**
  - More about this later . .
- **Home**
  - Decorating, baking, cleaning
- **Finances**
  - The holidays are expensive! Gifts, food, end of year bills
- **Lack of Sleep**
  - Sleep? What’s that?!?
- **Children**
  - Want the holiday to be special for them – extra activities
- **Health**
  - Exposed to new or additional triggers
- **Work**
  - Projects are often due at the year’s end
Stress Management
Information from the Centers for Disease Control

1. Take breaks from the news
   - Especially at election time!
   - Stay informed without hearing about traumatic events – Disconnect!

2. Take care of yourself
   - Eat healthy, exercise, get plenty of sleep, and give yourself a break if you feel stressed out

3. Take care of your body
   - Avoid excessive alcohol, tobacco & substance use
   - Continue with routine health prevention
   - Get vaccinated

4. Make time to unwind
   - Try to do some other activities you enjoy
   - Personal rest & renewal

5. Talk to others
   - Talk with people you trust about your concerns & how you’re feeling.
   - Share your problems with your trusted person or people

6. Community- or faith-based organizations
   - Share your burdens

7. Avoid drugs or alcohol
   - These may seem to help, but they can create additional problems and increase the stress you already feel

8. Recognize when you need more help
   - If problems continue or you are thinking about suicide, talk to a psychologist, social worker, or professional counselor
Holiday Stress Busters!

- Shop throughout the year/ take a trip
- Create easy family traditions
- Holiday Perfection
- Ask for help!
- Say NO to activities
- Remodeling projects
THE SCENT OF THE SEASON

Fragrances affect both allergies & asthma

**Allergies**

**Fragrances**

- Skin care products, colognes, perfumes, moisturizers, soaps, deodorants, aftershave, air fresheners, plug-in deodorizers, wick diffusers, fireplaces, bonfires

- They may make things smell nice but contain chemicals that our immune system may not like very much

- At Holiday time, add: scented candles, pinecones, Christmas trees, potpourri, cinnamon brooms

**Asthma**

**Fragrances are a common asthma trigger**

- Lung function can change when exposed to strong odors

- Causes asthma exacerbation – coughing & wheezing

- Remove the odor from your environment or remove yourself from the odor

- Have inhaler handy

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**Did you know?**

41% of people with asthma report health problems from air fresheners or deodorizers.

Graphic from https://www.asthma.com/understanding-asthma/asthma-triggers/strong-odors-and-asthma/
Asthma triggers that are hard to avoid at the holidays

Explore Common Asthma Triggers

- Smoking
- Dust Mites & Insects
- Medications
- Food Sensitivities
- Allergies & Pollen
- Pets
- Exercise
- Air Quality & Pollution
- Strong Odors
- Stress
- Illnesses
- Weather Changes

Tips for managing strong odors – allergies & asthma

- Avoid secondhand smoke of any kind
- Consider using cleaning and personal care products that are odor and fragrance free
- Ask friends and family to limit their use of perfumes
- Make sure your home and workplace are well ventilated

Graphic from https://www.asthma.com/understanding-asthma/asthma-triggers/strong-odors-and-asthma/
Navigating scents while shopping

Avoid the holiday aisle

Be careful on the laundry soap aisle

Avoid the perfume counter

Try to avoid people wearing perfume or body spray

WHERE TO STAY
11/7/22

POLL QUESTION

When traveling, where do you stay?

SO MANY CHOICES THESE DAYS . . .

Traveling to see the sights?
Traveling to see family?

- Hotels & motels
  - Chain hotels, independently owned
- Other people’s homes
  - Your aunt with 5 cats? Your kids homes? Your parents?
- Rentals
  - Air bnb, VRBO and many more
Potential triggers at hotels & rentals

Staying poolside?
Chlorine and mold can be present

Who has stayed in the room before?
Someone with a service animal?

Smoke
Even with a nonsmoking room, ask for a room as far away from smoking rooms as possible

Carpeting
Is there a room without carpeting? Less allergens!

Cleaning fumes
A big issue! Some hotel chains now offer asthma or allergy friendly rooms – always ask!

Staying at other’s homes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pets ☑️</td>
<td>Pets allowed in all rooms? ✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food allergies / dining ☑️</td>
<td>Remind them, carry autoinjectors ✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleanliness ☑️</td>
<td>Clean or vacuum when you arrive ✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal products / cleaning supplies ☑️</td>
<td>Temporarily move the supplies from your room or bathroom ✗</td>
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# Staying at hotels & rentals

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<td>Cleaning</td>
<td>✗ Put Do Not Disturb hang tag on doorknob</td>
</tr>
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<td>Air fresheners, signature scents</td>
<td>✗ Ask for a room without diffusers or plug-in air fresheners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dust mites</td>
<td>✗ Bring your own towels, bedding or a sleep sack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car and bus idling, smoking at the front entrance</td>
<td>✗ Side entrance availability</td>
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Weather Issues

- Cold and windy air can trigger asthma symptoms and flare-ups
- High altitude – skiing anyone?
- Colds and flu season - can lead to more inflammation of your airways
- Cold weather may keep you indoors – more triggers
- Any changes in weather

Dealing with Weather Issues

- Cover your nose and mouth with a scarf to warm the air before you breathe it in
- Use your short-acting albuterol inhaler at the FIRST sign of symptoms to keep asthma from getting worse
- Stay if weather changes bother your asthma. Breathing warmer air will help open your airways – but avoid indoor allergens & irritants

If you experience symptoms frequently in cold weather, talk with your doctor about a long-term treatment plan.
AIR QUALITY

- Big cities
- Humid areas
- Campfires
- Hot and humid places

The holidays can expose you to new allergens

Holiday decorations, travel and stress can all present challenges for people with allergies and asthma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New people, new environments</th>
<th>Holiday triggers</th>
<th>New, close contacts</th>
<th>Eats &amp; treats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel &amp; visitors can expose you to new allergens &amp; risk the development of new allergies</td>
<td>Candles, fires in the fireplace, fire pits outdoors</td>
<td>We’ve social distanced for a few years – people are more comfortable with hugs and being close again – perfume &amp; germs can cause issues</td>
<td>New foods, cross-contact and hidden ingredients in holiday foods can cause new allergies or cause a reaction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Helping Children with Food Allergies

**Plan Ahead**
Call the restaurant to alert them to the food allergy. Work with the staff at all levels – chef, wait staff, etc. Talk about cross contact. Carry a chef card
Remind children not to eat someone else’s food.

**Be Watchful**
Seat young children with food allergies near family members who can keep an eye on them – remind them no food sharing, using utensils and napkins rather than fingers.) Remember, food allergens must not touch the mucosal membranes (mouth, eyes, or nose)

**Keep it Fun**
Focus on what the child CAN eat - rather than what they can’t. Pack safe treats or food. Remind family members ahead of time and ask what food is being served. Explain the seriousness of a food allergy

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**Holiday tips**

- **Real tree** – if possible, rinse the tree, including the trunk
  - This removes mold spores, pollen and terpene, an allergenic substance found in the sap of trees
  - Bring the tree inside once it’s fully dry – the scent may still be irritating

- **Keep artificial trees and holiday decorations free of dust in storage**
  - Store them in plastic or large bins
  - Have someone without allergies & asthma remove the tree and decorations for you

- **Don’t feel obligated to visit homes with known allergens and irritants**
  - Watch for cigarette smoke, wood-burning fireplaces, scented candles or pets
  - It may be best to skip party

- **Get your flu, COVID-19 and pneumonia vaccines**
  - Talk to your doctor about when to get your vaccines. It’s recommended that you get a COVID booster 2 weeks or more before family gatherings
POLL QUESTION

Are you traveling this holiday season?

WHAT TO PACK
Packing

☑️ Pack your medicines first

☑️ Bring your allergy or asthma plan

☑️ Have a list of your medications

Other Packing Tips

01 | Packing your child’s favorite blanket or pillow

02 | Does your doctor want you pack oral steroids?

03 | Don’t forget allergies pills and nose spray

04 | Pack your favorite lotion filled tissues
If you need medical help during the holidays

1. Bring “Out of State” Insurance Card
2. Look up facilities before you leave
3. Urgent Care vs Hospital?
4. Best way to get there?
5. Nearby pharmacy?
6. Follow up with doctor at home

QUESTIONS

Put your questions in the question box.
We’ll get to as many as we can!
Next Webinar

Join us for our upcoming webinar:

Chronic Cough Concerns

Thursday, November 17, 2022
4:00 PM ET

Breathe Better Together

Please remain online for 2 – 3 minutes to complete an evaluation survey! Thank you!