



WELLNESS WORKS....

at Brain Injury Community Re-entry (Niagara) Inc.

A Publication from Brain Injury Community Re-entry Niagara's Wellness Works Committee

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LUNG HEALTH

Lung health during the holidays: Avoid potential triggers

'Tis the season to be jolly...but if you have a long-term breathing disease like asthma or COPD, 'tis the season to be on guard, too.

Research shows that people with asthma and COPD are more likely to be hospitalized during the Christmas holiday period. The main reason – people pick up colds and other germs at social events, and these viruses trigger flare-ups. Scented candles and mold found on Christmas trees also trigger symptoms for some people.

In addition, extra stress, travel, getting tired and eating badly can all take their toll on your health during the holidays. You can protect your breathing this holiday season by taking good care of yourself. You can also take some simple steps to avoid germs and triggers.

To protect your breathing this holiday season:

- Wash your hands properly and often. Handwashing is the best way to stop the spread of germs.
- Stay away from people who are sick.
- Get your flu shot each year, and ask your doctor about a pneumonia shot.
- Make sure your prescriptions are up-to-date so that you are prepared to treat a flare-up.
- If you're travelling, take extra supplies of your medicine. Make sure the place you're staying is free of smoke and other triggers.
- Keep your medicine on hand.
- Watch your symptoms and follow the instructions in your action plan.
- Get help if you need it.

To prevent flare-ups, avoid these indoor triggers:

- Real Christmas trees, if you are allergic to the mold and pollen often found on branches and needles.
- Dust from holiday decorations that have been in storage. Have someone else wipe them with a damp cloth.
- Scented products, like candles and potpourri
- Wood smoke from stoves and fireplaces
- Burning wrapping paper

If cold outdoor air triggers your asthma or COPD symptoms:

- Wear a scarf or face mask over your nose and mouth, to help warm the air before you breathe it in.
- Breathe through your nose, not your mouth – this also helps warm the air before it reaches your lungs.
- If you plan to exercise outdoors, first do warm-up exercises indoors.
- If need be, take a dose of your quick-relief medicine (rescue inhaler, usually in a blue puffer) before you go outside.

Lung Diseases for your reference:

Asthma, COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), Infectious lung diseases (H1N1, SARS, seasonal flu, common cold), Lung cancer, Sleep apnea, Tuberculosis, Allergies, bronchitis, emphysema, Farmer's Lung, Cystic Fibrosis, pneumonia (Resource: www.lung.ca)



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There are lots of things you can do to keep your lungs healthy and strong for life:

- If you don't smoke, don't start!
- If you smoke or use tobacco, quit; quitting is the most important thing you can do to keep your lungs healthy and prevent disease. Smoking damages your lungs and increases your risk for a number of diseases including lung cancer. It's never too late to quit.
- Teach your children about the dangers of smoking and be a role model by not smoking or by quitting now.
- Avoid second-hand smoke. Breathing the smoke from cigarettes and pipes increases your risk for the same diseases that affect people who smoke.
- Fight germs by washing your hands properly and covering your coughs and sneezes- this will help you prevent infectious lung diseases like the flu, colds, and others.
- Do your part to control outdoor air pollution and keep the air we breathe clean. For example, avoid open air burning and don't let your car idle.
- Get moving! Regular physical exercise is good for your whole body and especially your lungs. Exercise makes your lungs stronger and better at giving your body the oxygen it needs. It also helps to boost your body to fight germs that could make you sick.
- If you have a chronic lung disease like asthma or COPD, work with your doctor to manage your symptoms and avoid flare-ups.
- Pay attention to lung health at work. Avoid breathing toxic fumes from chemicals, solvents, and paints. Wear a protective mask when you work with chemicals and report unsafe working conditions.

The two main sources of indoor air pollutants that affect humans can be characterized as either biological or chemical.

Biological pollutants

Biological pollutants originate from living things or are themselves living things. These contaminants can also be either gases or particles (e.g. mould spores). Some common sources of biological pollutants include pets and mattresses.

Chemical pollutants

Chemical pollutants can be either gases (e.g. carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide) or particles (e.g. soot).

Common sources of chemical pollutants include:

- Oil and gas appliances
- Second-hand (tobacco) smoke
- Paints, scents, pesticides
- Household products like cleaners, air fresheners, etc.



What can you do to limit indoor and outdoor pollution?

- Don't idle your vehicle.
- Don't use gas or diesel-powered equipment, including lawnmowers and barbecues.
- Turn off non-essential lights and electronics.
- Don't use pesticides.
- Use energy-efficient appliances.
- Reduce your heating needs by making your house more energy efficient.
- Keep your furnace, air conditioner and humidifier well maintained.
- If you need to use an air conditioner, set it at a moderate temperature, around 23 degrees Celsius. When you leave the house, turn the air conditioner down.
- In the winter, heat your house to 20 degrees or less when you're up, lower when you're in bed or out of the house.
- Use hand-powered garden tools. Avoid using gasoline or diesel-powered equipment such as lawnmowers and leaf-blowers.
- Compost leaves, garden trimmings, and kitchen waste.