

# Help Yourself to a Healthy Home



## *Protect Your Children's Health*



- Indoor Air Quality
- Asthma & Allergies
- Mold & Moisture

- Carbon Monoxide
- Lead
- Drinking Water

- Hazardous Household Products
- Pesticides
- Home Safety







# Help Yourself to a *Healthy Home*

**Y**ou want to take good care of your family. You try to eat healthy foods. You take your children to the doctor for regular checkups. You try your best to protect your family from accidents and illness. You want to live in a safe neighborhood and home.

***But did you know your home might have hidden dangers to your children's health? Ask yourself:***

- Is the air in your home clean and healthy?
- Do your children have breathing problems, like asthma?
- Is someone in your home allergic to mold?
- Do you know the signs of carbon monoxide poisoning?
- Is there lead anywhere in your home?
- Is your tap water safe to drink?
- Do you have household products with chemicals in them that can make you sick?
- Do you use bug spray or other products to keep away pests?
- Do you keep poisons where your children can reach them?

The answers to questions like these will help you learn if your home is safe and healthy. This booklet will make it easier to answer these and other important questions about your home and how you live in it. It will also give you ideas about how to protect your children's health. It is up to you to make sure your home is a healthy home, but there are lots of places to go for help.

## Table of Contents

Introduction .....	2-5	Drinking Water.....	33-37
Indoor Air Quality.....	6-10	Hazardous Household Products...	38-41
Asthma & Allergies.....	11-16	Pesticides .....	42-47
Mold & Moisture.....	17-22	Home Safety.....	48-54
Carbon Monoxide.....	23-28	Index .....	55
Lead.....	29-32		

# Why *Should You* Be Concerned?

Some of the most serious health problems for children may start at home. This booklet explains some of these health concerns and what you can do about them.

**Most people spend over 90% of their time indoors.**

## Indoor Air Quality

---

***Is the air in your home healthy?*** The air inside can be more harmful to your family's health than the air outdoors. Air can be unhealthy if it has too many pollutants. Indoor air pollutants can be lots of things—from oven cleaner to cigarette smoke to mold. It is not always easy to tell if your home has unhealthy air. You may notice bad smells or see smoke, but you cannot see or smell other

dangers, like carbon monoxide and radon. This chapter will help you learn if your home has healthy air. *See page 6.*

***The number of children with asthma has doubled in the past 50 years.***

***One in 15 children under 18 years of age has asthma.***

## Asthma & Allergies

---

Allergies and asthma are health problems that have a lot to do with the air you breathe. You and your children spend a lot of time at home, so the air inside needs to be clean. Does someone

you live with smoke? Do you have pets? Is your basement damp? These may cause or add to breathing problems. *To learn more about asthma and allergies, see page 11.*

## Mold & Moisture

---

Other health and safety problems may come from the air in your home, too. Too much dampness causes mold to grow. Some mold is

very harmful and some can make allergies and asthma worse. *See page 17 to find out more about mold.*

# Carbon Monoxide

---

If they are not working right, ovens and heaters may cause a deadly gas called carbon monoxide to build up inside your home. You cannot see or smell this danger, but you can help keep

your loved ones safe from carbon monoxide poisoning. *See page 23 to learn more about how to protect your family from carbon monoxide.*

## Lead

---

***Can your children be poisoned by lead in your home?*** Some house paint and water pipes contain lead. This metal can poison your children. Most problems with lead come from old paint or lead dust. Lead was also in gasoline and got into the soil and air from car exhaust. It's not used in these ways any more. There's still plenty of lead around, though.

Lead can poison your children if they get it into their mouths or breathe it in from the air. If a pregnant woman gets lead in her body, it can harm her unborn baby.

Lead poisoning can be a serious problem for young children. It can cause problems with learning, growth, and behavior that last a lifetime.

Even small amounts of lead can harm children. *Turn to page 29 to find out more about lead poisoning.*



***One in 40 American children has too much lead in his/her body.***

## Drinking Water

---

***Is your drinking water safe?*** Do you know where your drinking water comes from? If it comes from your own well, you need to make sure it is safe to drink. Have your water tested every year to make sure it does not have chemicals or other pollutants in it that can make your family sick. There are things you can do to take care of your well and keep the water clean. *See page 35 for ideas.*

You may get your drinking water from a water company or utility. They always test the water

before they pipe it to you to make sure it is safe. You can ask the company or utility for a report on what the tests found. Even if it is okay at the water utility, water can still become unsafe after it comes into your home. *Look at page 33 to learn more about drinking water.*

***Approximately 95% of people living in rural areas use private wells for their drinking water.***

# Hazardous Household Products

---

**What harmful products do you have in your home?** Some products can harm your family's health if you do not use them in the right way. Common chemicals like bleach, rat poison, paint strippers, and drain cleaners can be dangerous. Children can poison themselves if they get into products like these. Even very small amounts of some chemicals can cause health problems if you touch them or breathe them in. Remember—if you spray or pump something, it goes right into

the air. When you and your family breathe, those chemicals go into your bodies. *See page 38 to learn more about how to use, store, and dispose of household products.*

**Thousands of children die each year from chemicals stored and used improperly in the home.**

## Pesticides

---

**Do you use pesticides in your home?** Almost every household uses pesticides. Bug spray, flea powder, rat poison, and garden weed killer are all types of pesticides. They have chemicals in them that kill pests. This also means they may harm you and your family. If you do not use them safely, some pesticides may cause serious health problems—poisoning, birth defects, nerve damage, and even cancer.

Your children can come into contact with pesticides in many ways. You can take simple steps to protect them from pesticides. *See page 42 to see if you are using pesticides safely.*

**Nearly one-half of households with a child under age 5 have pesticides stored within reach of children.**

## Home Safety

---

**Did you know that your chances of getting hurt at home are much higher than they are at work or school?** The leading causes of death in the home are falls, drowning, fires, poisoning, suffocation, choking, and guns. Very young children and older adults are the people most likely to get hurt at home. It's important to keep people's ages in mind when thinking about home safety.

Look at page 48 to find out if your home is a safe place to live and how to make it even safer.

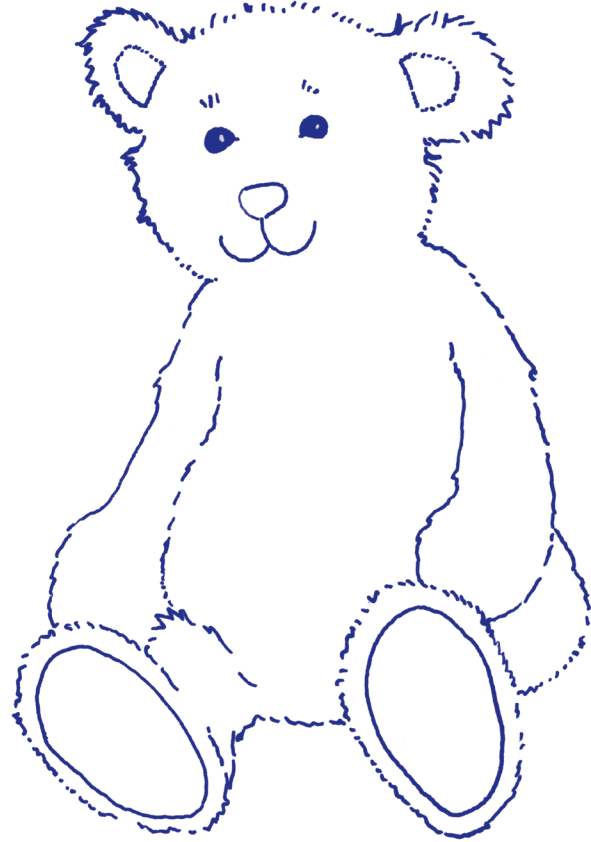
**Each year, accidents in the home hurt more than 6 million people.**

# Why *Focus on* Children?

**Everyone needs a healthy home.** But there are special reasons to think about children:

- Children's bodies are still growing. Their young brains, livers, and other organs are more likely to be harmed by chemicals and other dangers than those of adults. If children get sick, it may be harder for them to get well because their immune systems are still developing.
- For their size, children eat more food, drink more water, and breathe more air than adults do. When they get lead in their bodies or breathe in harmful gases, they get a bigger dose than adults would.
- Children play and crawl on the ground. That means they are closer to many things that might cause health problems, like dust and chemicals. Babies and young children also put almost everything in their mouths—things that might have chemicals or lead dust on them.

***Children depend on adults to make their homes safe!***



## How to Use This Booklet

**T**his booklet asks questions about your home and how you live in it. By answering them, you can find out if your home is healthy or if you need to make some changes.

There are nine chapters in this booklet. Every chapter gives information about a topic, asks questions about it, and gives you simple action steps to protect your children's health. At the end of each chapter, you will find out where to get more help.

It's up to you. ***Help Yourself to a Healthy Home!***

# Indoor Air Quality

## Should You Be Concerned?

**M**ost people spend at least half of their lives inside their homes. The air inside can be more harmful to your family's health than the air outdoors. Is the air in your home safe to breathe?

It is not always easy to tell if your home has poor air quality. You may notice bad smells or see smoke, but you cannot see or smell other dangers, like carbon monoxide and radon. This chapter and those on asthma and allergies, mold, and carbon monoxide will help you ask the right questions to find out if the air inside your home is healthy and safe. They will also give you ideas about how to fix any problems you might find.

***The air in your home can be unhealthy if it has too many pollutants in it. To cut down on indoor air pollution, learn where it comes from. Take good care of your home to keep it healthy!***

***Children can spend up to 90% of their time indoors. For their size, children breathe up to twice as much air as adults. That means children are at greater risk for health problems that come from indoor air pollution.***

### Asthma and Allergies

If people in your home have health problems or are ill, polluted indoor air can make them feel worse. For example, asthma is a lung disease that affects a growing number of children. Indoor air pollution can make it worse. Insects and other pests can also be a real problem for people with asthma or allergies. For example, cockroach and dust mite droppings cause asthma attacks in some people. Pesticides can help fight these pests, but they can be dangerous. See page 44 for more information about using bug spray and other pesticides safely. See page 11 to find out about making your home healthier for people with asthma or allergies.

### Mold

Mold grows in wet or damp places. It often smells musty. Many people are allergic to mold. Some kinds of mold are toxic, and coming into contact with large amounts of mold may cause health problems. Talk to a doctor if you think mold is causing health problems for you or your family. See page 17 to learn more about how to control mold in your home.

### Carbon Monoxide

Carbon monoxide is a deadly gas that can come from appliances that burn gas, oil, coal, or wood and are not working as they should. Car exhaust also has carbon monoxide. You cannot see, taste, or smell carbon monoxide. See page 23 for more information on how to protect your family from carbon monoxide poisoning.

### Other Indoor Air Problems

Radon is another gas. It can get into some homes from the ground below them. You cannot see, taste, or smell radon. Radon is found all over the United States. Radon can cause lung cancer. In fact, it is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States. If you smoke and your home has high levels of radon, your risk of lung cancer is especially high.



# Indoor Air Quality

## ***Sometimes indoor air pollution comes from what people do in their homes.***

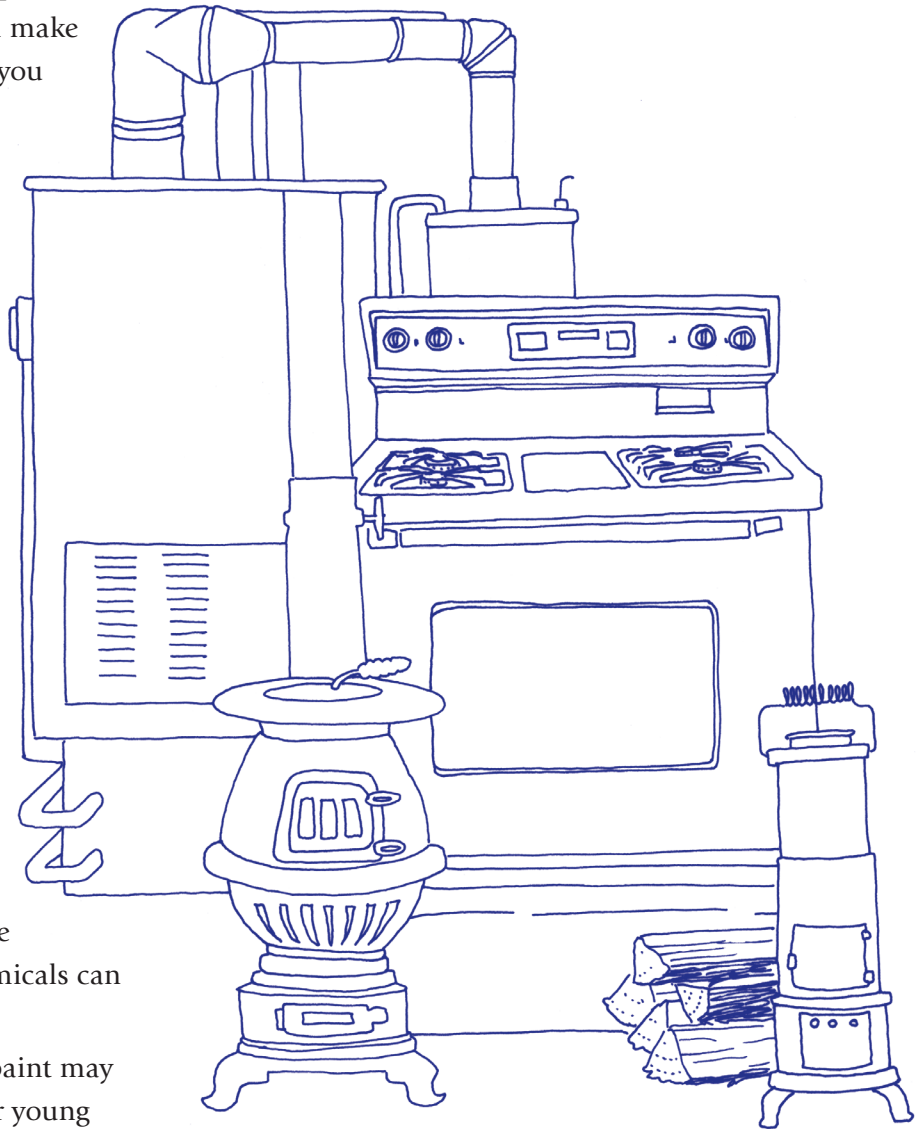
- Tobacco smoking causes cancer and other major health problems. It's unsafe for children to be around smokers. Second-hand or environmental tobacco smoke can raise children's risk of ear infections and breathing problems. It can trigger asthma attacks, too.
- Many families have pets. However, furry pets cause problems for some people. Pets can make asthma and allergies act up, especially if you keep them in sleeping areas.
- Hobbies and home projects sometimes involve sanding, painting, welding, or using solvent chemicals, like varnish or paint strippers. (A solvent is a chemical that can dissolve something else. Solvents are usually liquid.) Home projects can pollute the air with dust or harmful chemicals.

## ***Sometimes indoor air pollution comes from what people have in their homes.***

- Some household products, especially those with solvents, can pollute the air if you don't use them in the right way. See page 38 for more information about household products.
- New furniture, carpets, and building products may give off chemicals that were used in their making. Some of these chemicals can harm people, especially children.
- If your home was built before 1978, the paint may have lead in it. Lead is very dangerous for young children. See page 29 to learn about protecting your children from lead poisoning.

There are simple but important steps you can take to find out what is causing poor air quality. The questions on

the next page can help you find problems around your home. Page 9 will give you ideas of what to do. Look at the chapters on asthma and allergies, mold, and carbon monoxide to learn more about indoor air problems. Remember, making your home a safer, healthier place to live may mean taking several steps.



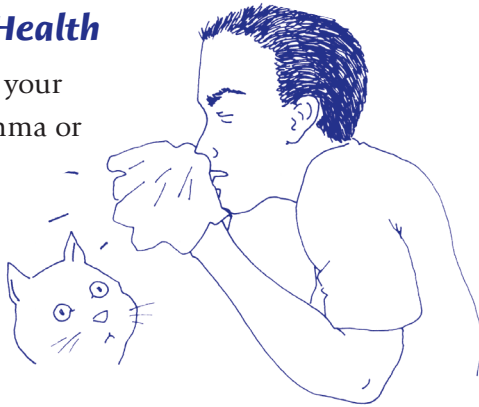
***Combustion appliances are one possible source of air pollution.***

# Indoor Air Quality

## Questions to Ask

### Your Family's Health

- Does anyone in your family have asthma or allergies?
- Does a family member notice burning eyes, coughing, or sneezing that happens most often while at home?
- Does anyone in your home have chronic bronchitis or another lung disease?

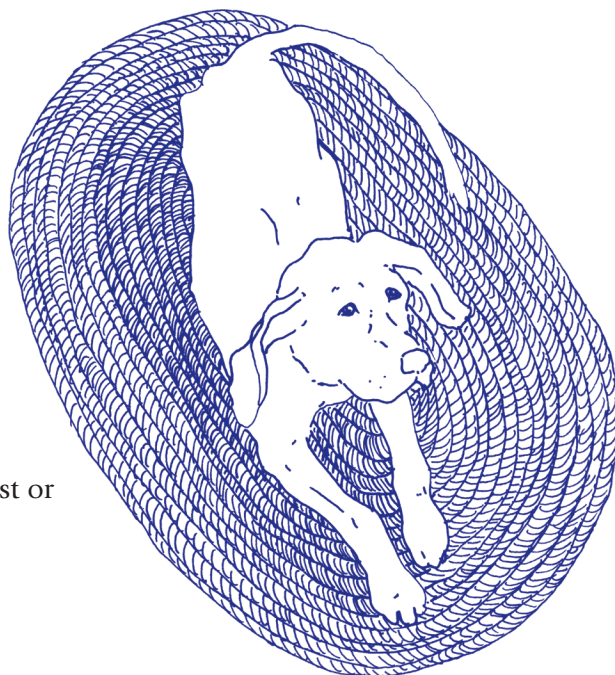


### Radon

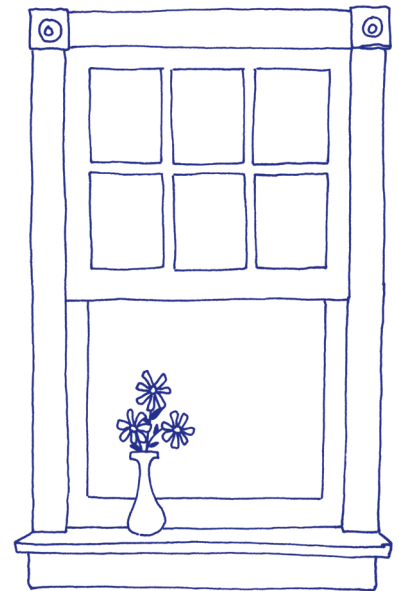
- Have you ever tested your home for radon?
- Do any of your neighbors have problems with radon gas? If so, you might also have a radon problem.

### Living in a Healthy Home

- Do some areas in your home smell damp or musty?
- Have you seen cockroaches in your home?
- Do you know how to safely run and take care of your fuel-burning appliances?
- Do you allow smoking in your home?
- Do you have furry pets in your home? In the bedrooms?
- Do you read the label on household products and follow the directions for using them safely?
- Do you open windows or turn on fans when doing hobbies or projects that make dust or odors?
- Do you try to do dusty or smelly projects outdoors?



- Do you choose furniture, carpet, and building products that are made with nontoxic chemicals and materials? These are sometimes called green building products.
- Does your home ever smell musty, damp, smoky, or like chemicals?
- Does your home seem stuffy or stale? Can you smell cooking odors the next day?
- Do your bathroom and kitchen have exhaust fans? Do you use them?



# ACTION STEPS

**B**e sure to check the action steps in the chapters on asthma and allergies, mold, and carbon monoxide. You will find good suggestions for cutting down on pollution in your home and making the air healthier.

### Test Your Home for Radon

You can buy low-cost radon test kits at hardware or home supply stores. Or call your local or state health department for more information.

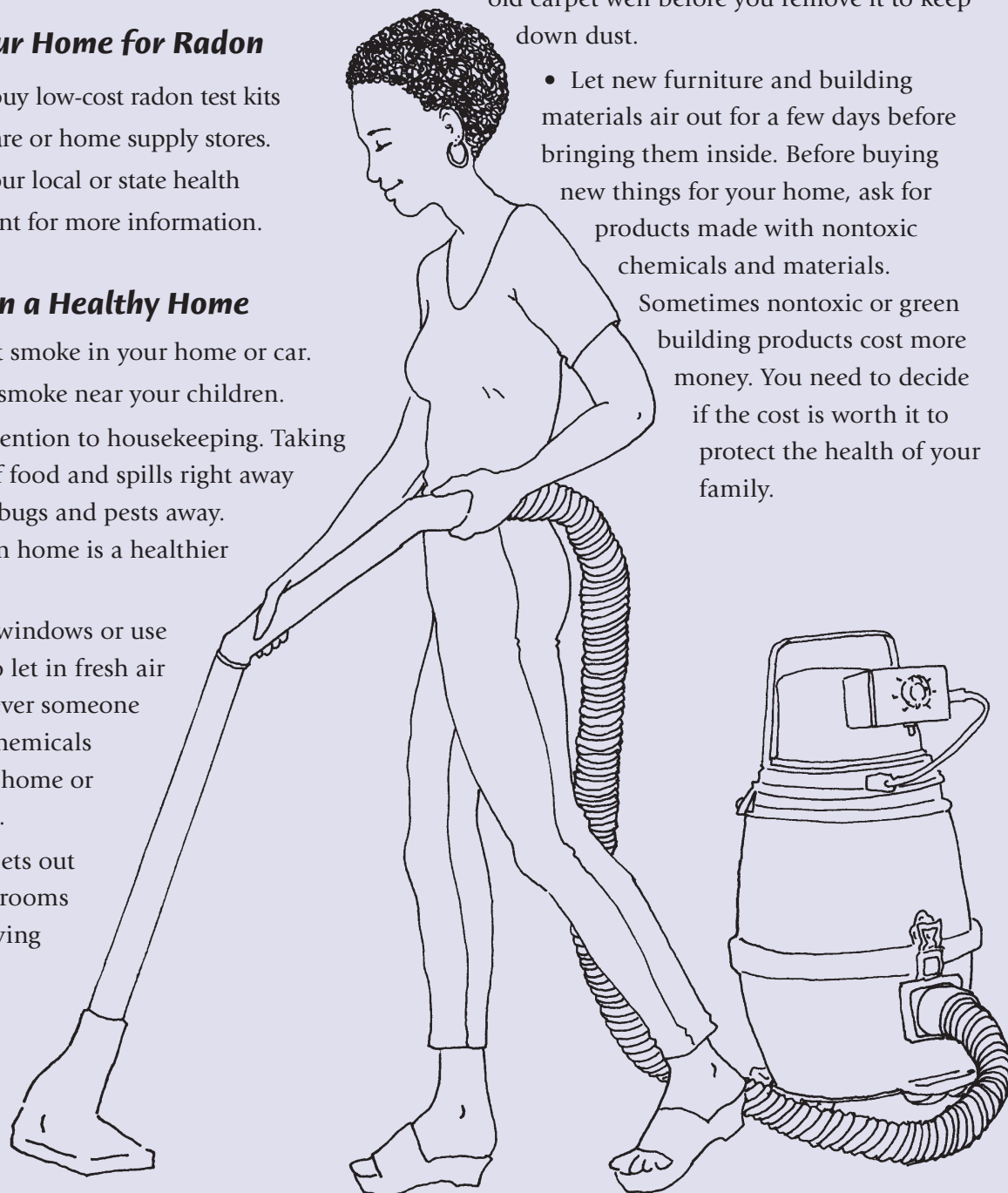
### Living in a Healthy Home

- Do not smoke in your home or car.  
*Never* smoke near your children.
- Pay attention to housekeeping. Taking care of food and spills right away keeps bugs and pests away. A clean home is a healthier home.
- Open windows or use fans to let in fresh air whenever someone uses chemicals in the home or garage.
- Keep pets out of bedrooms and living areas.

- Ask the salesperson to unroll new carpet and let it air out for at least one day before bringing it into your home. Put in carpet during a season when you can open windows for several days afterward. Vacuum old carpet well before you remove it to keep down dust.

- Let new furniture and building materials air out for a few days before bringing them inside. Before buying new things for your home, ask for products made with nontoxic chemicals and materials.

Sometimes nontoxic or green building products cost more money. You need to decide if the cost is worth it to protect the health of your family.



# Indoor Air Quality

## When In Doubt, Check It Out!

- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Indoor Air Quality—[www.epa.gov/iaq](http://www.epa.gov/iaq)
- Indoor Air Quality Information Clearinghouse (800) 438-4318 Monday to Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. ET  
e-mail: [iaqinfo@aol.com](mailto:iaqinfo@aol.com)
- National Radon Information Hotline (800) SOS-RADON/(800) 767-7236
- National Lead Information Center (800) 424-LEAD/(800) 424-5323
- U.S. EPA Radon Information  
— [www.epa.gov/radon](http://www.epa.gov/radon)
- National Hispanic Indoor Air Quality Hotline (800) SALUD-12/(800) 725-8312 Monday to Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. ET
- American Lung Association (800) LUNG-USA/(800) 586-4872  
—[www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org)
- *Home\*A\*Syst: An Environmental Risk Assessment Guide for the Home*, (608) 262-0024  
—[www.uwex.edu/homeasyst](http://www.uwex.edu/homeasyst)

## Notes





# Asthma & Allergies

## Should You Be Concerned?

**M**ore than 8 million children in the United States have a disease called asthma.

Asthma is a leading reason that children miss school or end up in the hospital. Asthma makes it hard for people to breathe. Sometimes people even die from asthma. This disease has no cure yet, but it can be controlled.

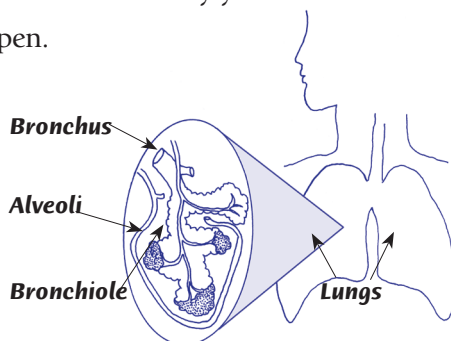
Another 40 to 50 million people have allergies. Allergies can also make it hard for people to breathe by causing an asthma attack. An allergy is an unusual reaction to something, like a food or a plant, that is normally harmless. Common signs of allergies are a stuffy or runny nose, itching, or a rash. This section will help you ask the right questions to find out how to make your home a safer, healthier place for people with asthma or allergies.

### What Happens During an Asthma Attack?

Asthma flare-ups are called asthma attacks. During an attack, the breathing tubes in your lungs, called *bronchi* and *bronchioles*, get smaller. During an asthma attack:

- Breathing tubes in your lungs swell up.
- Muscles around these tubes tighten.
- Tubes make large amounts of a thick fluid called mucus.

You cannot catch asthma. It does run in families, though. If someone in your family has it, you or your children may, too. The number of asthma cases is growing and more people die from it every year. These deaths do not need to happen.



### Warning Signs of an Asthma Attack:

- Tightness in the chest
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Coughing

People with asthma who learn to spot the early signs of an attack can take medicine right away. This may make the attack less severe.

**If someone is having a severe asthma attack**, get him or her to a hospital emergency room right away. Some signs of a severe attack:

- The person's asthma *rescue* or *inhaler medicine* doesn't help within 15 minutes.
- The person's lips or fingernails are blue.
- The person has trouble walking or talking due to shortness of breath.

The most important thing to know about asthma is that you can control it. Asthma patients (or their parents) who learn what medicine to take and what triggers attacks can avoid them most of the time. That means people with asthma can lead normal lives.

Many types of medicine can treat asthma. Keep in mind that no one medicine works best for everyone. You and your doctor have to work together to find the best medicine. Remember, it may take a while to find just the right kinds. Also, you must take the time to find out what sets off an attack.

# Asthma & Allergies

## Asthma Triggers

No one knows what causes asthma. Lots of things set off asthma attacks, though. These things are called triggers. Some people have only one or two triggers. Other people have many.

Some triggers are things that people are often allergic to. Common ones are pollen (from trees and flowers) and dander (skin flakes from cats, dogs, and other pets).

Also, some people are allergic to pests such

as roaches, rodents, or dust mites. Dust mites are tiny insects that you can't

see. They live everywhere—in carpets, upholstered furniture, stuffed animals, and

bedding. Cigarette smoke

is another common trigger of asthma

attacks. Other triggers

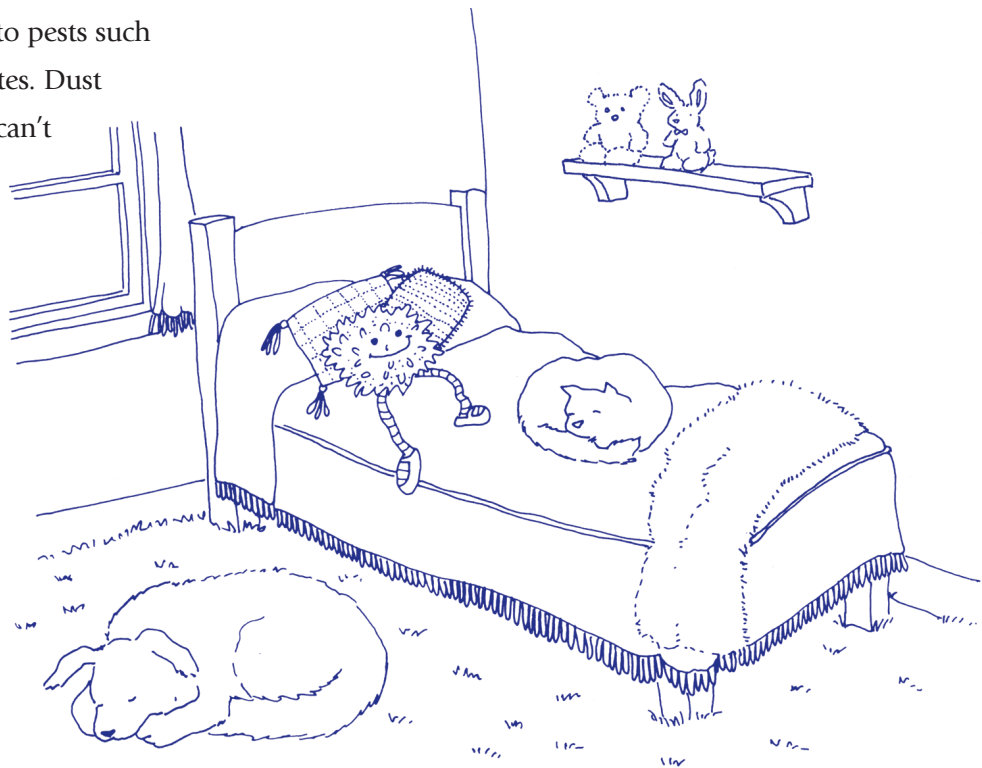
have nothing to do

with allergies—cold

weather, exercise,

and strong feelings

(laughing, crying).

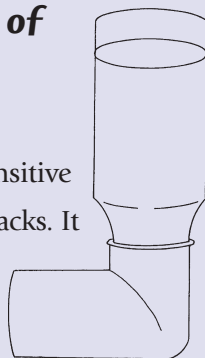


## Other Common Asthma Triggers

- Dust
- Mold
- Carbon monoxide
- Cleaning products like furniture polish or dusting sprays
- Personal care products like hair spray or perfume
- Flu, colds

## There are two main types of asthma medicine.

One kind you (or your child) take regularly to make the lungs less sensitive to the things that cause asthma attacks. It is important to take this medicine as prescribed, even if you feel okay. It usually takes a couple of weeks to work. The other type is called *rescue medicine*.



You take this during an attack to help open up your breathing tubes so you can breathe better.

Some “everyday” asthma medicines are steroids. Some people may worry about them because they have heard stories about athletes who use steroids in the wrong way. Asthma steroids are not the same. Side effects of asthma steroids are also rare. Asthma patients usually breathe these medicines right into their lungs, so they only need a small dose.

# Asthma & Allergies

---

## Allergies

Common signs of allergies include a runny or stuffy nose, coughing, hives, itching, a rash, or puffy eyes. Allergies can be deadly for some people. When sensitive people come in contact with something they're very allergic to, like peanuts, their blood pressure drops, their breathing tubes swell up, and they can die from lack of air. The good news is that allergies can be treated. If you have allergies, it's important to find out what causes them and how to take care of them. A doctor can test you to find out. People with severe allergies may need to carry emergency medicine.

## Common Allergens

An allergen is something that causes allergy signs, or an allergic reaction. Many of the asthma triggers listed on page 12 also cause allergic reactions in people who don't have asthma. There are many other allergens, too. Some common ones are listed here. It's important to talk to your doctor if you have had a reaction to any of these:

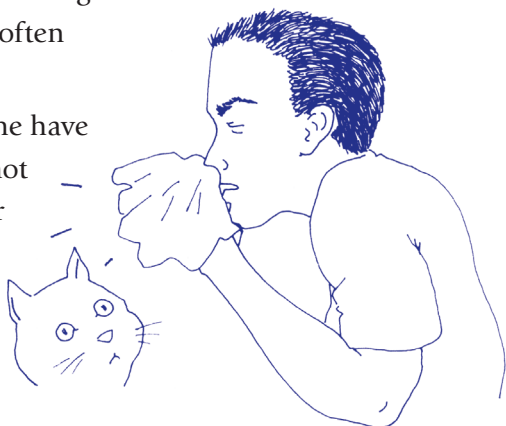
- **Foods:** milk and dairy products, citrus fruit like oranges and lemons, artificial colors and flavors, nuts, and shellfish like shrimp or clams
- **Medicines:** penicillin, some heart medicines, and some antiseizure medicines
- **Insect stings and bites:** most caused by yellow jackets, honeybees, paper wasps, hornets, and fire ants. (In some people, reactions to stings become more serious as years go by. Eventually, only one sting may kill. Talk to your doctor if you have had a serious reaction to a sting.)
- **Contact allergens:** cause reactions when things like plants, cosmetics, jewelry, or latex (a type of rubber) touch the skin (Rashes are common reactions to these allergens.)

Look at the questions below to help you find problems around your home that may make asthma and allergies worse. Pages 14 and 15 will give you ideas about how to keep your family healthy and safe.

---

## Questions to Ask

- Does anyone in your family have asthma or allergies?
- Does someone in your family notice burning eyes, coughing, or sneezing that happens most often at home?
- Does your home have carpet that is not cleaned well or not cleaned often?
- Do you have carpeting, stuffed toys, or fleecy materials in bedrooms?
- How often do you wash sheets, blankets, and other bedding?
- Do you store food in containers or boxes that don't have covers?
- Do you keep pets inside?
- Has it been more than a year since you had your furnace, flues, and chimneys inspected and cleaned?
- Does anyone smoke inside your home?
- Is your home damp or musty?



## ACTION STEPS

### ***Pay Attention to Your Asthma and Allergies***

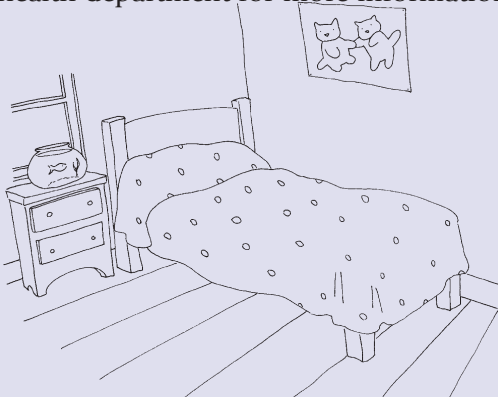
Know what triggers your or your children's asthma or allergies. Talk to a doctor or nurse about keeping emergency medicine around if your asthma or allergies are severe. If people you love take asthma or allergy medications, make sure they know when to take it.

### ***Healthy Housekeeping***

Clean your home often. Since cleaning puts dust into the air, have someone without asthma or allergies do it. Wear a dust mask if you can't find somebody else to clean. You can buy one at a drugstore.

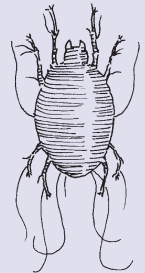
Keep clutter down. Clutter collects dust and makes it harder to keep a clean home. Store your belongings in plastic or cardboard boxes instead of keeping them in piles or stacks. You can move the boxes to make cleaning easier.

When possible, don't have carpeting or rugs. Hard floors (vinyl, wood, or tile) are much easier to keep dust free. If you do have rugs or carpet, vacuum often. You may be able to borrow or buy a vacuum with a special HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) filter to get rid of dust. Call your local or state health department for more information.



### ***Keep Down Dust Mites***

Use zippered plastic mattress and pillow covers beneath sheets and pillowcases. You can buy them at your local department store or through the mail. If the mattress cover is uncomfortable, put a mattress pad over it.



Wash bedding, including blankets, pillow covers, and mattress pads in hot water every week. Temperatures above 130°F kill dust mites.

### ***Control Other Pests***

Roaches and rodents can trigger asthma and allergies. They need food, water, warmth, and shelter to survive. You can control roaches, mice, and other pests by making these things hard to get. See the chapter on pesticides on page 42 to learn more about how to handle pests.



Here are some tips to keep pests away:

- Store food in tightly sealed containers.
- Clean up crumbs and spills right away.
- Empty your garbage often.
- Wash your dirty dishes right after eating.
- Don't leave out pet food or water overnight.
- Fix plumbing leaks and drips.
- Seal cracks where roaches and other bugs hide or get into your home.



# ACTION STEPS, *continued*

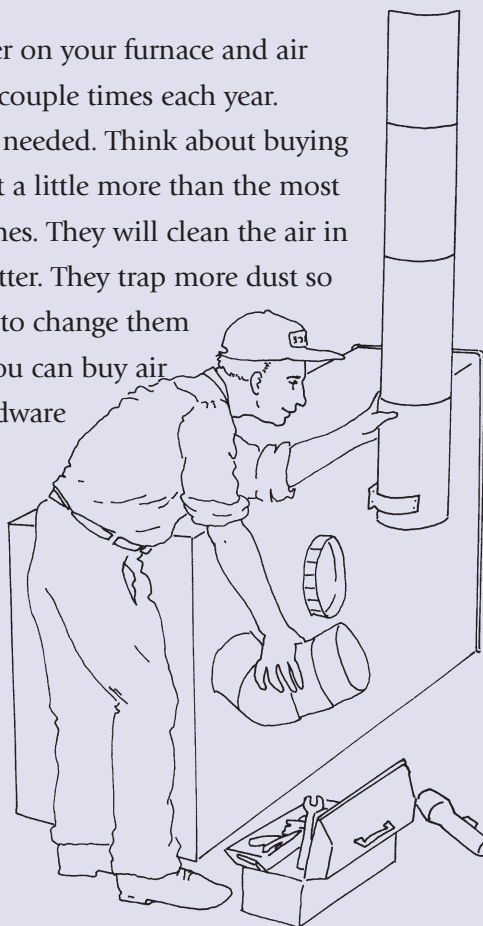
### **Pets**

Furry pets like dogs, cats, and gerbils can cause asthma and allergy attacks because of their saliva and skin flakes. It is best to either not have pets or keep them outside. If you do have pets inside, make sure to keep them out of sleeping areas and off fabric-covered furniture.

### **Check Your Appliances**

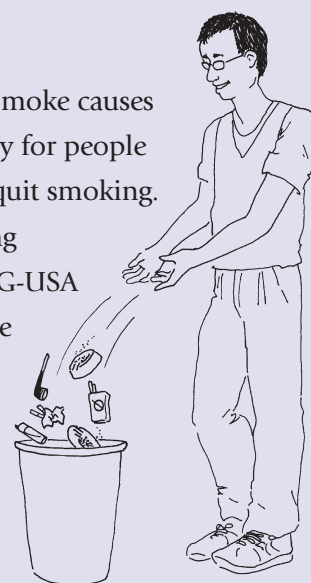
Make sure your gas appliances and fireplace, furnace, or wood-burning stove have yearly checkups to keep down soot and protect you from the dangers of carbon monoxide. See page 26 for more information.

Check the filter on your furnace and air conditioner a couple times each year. Change when needed. Think about buying filters that cost a little more than the most economical ones. They will clean the air in your home better. They trap more dust so you will need to change them more often. You can buy air filters at a hardware store. Check labels and packaging to find out about these products. If you rent, talk to your landlord about these steps.



### **Smoking**

Cigarette, cigar, and pipe smoke causes health problems, especially for people with asthma. It is best to quit smoking. Contact the American Lung Association at (800) LUNG-USA for help. Otherwise, smoke outside and away from children. Don't light up in your car because smoke will linger there and affect children.



### **Mold**

When people breathe in mold, it can cause allergies and asthma to act up. Mold needs water to grow. Keep your home dry to control mold. That will also help with roaches and dust mites. See the chapter on mold on page 17 for more information.

***Air cleaners may help in the bedrooms of allergy and asthma patients. Good air cleaners (with HEPA filters) cost about \$100 or so. DO NOT use an air cleaner that makes ozone because ozone can cause health problems.***

## Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

