



RESPIRATORY HEALTH

Improve Your Home's Air Quality for Better Breathing

By Stacey Lloyd

Living with CF means a never-ending struggle to clear the airways for better breathing. Medications and airway clearance techniques and devices provide temporary relief, but there are other things you can do, such as reduce the respiratory irritants in your home, to improve your breathing.

The home has dozens of respiratory irritants that can aggravate the respiratory tract and cause undue respiratory distress. With just a few changes to your home, the way you live and the things you use within your home, can drastically improve your breathing.

Avoid the Use of Aerosols

Aerosols can cause respiratory distress in persons with CF. Aerosols add harsh chemicals to the air that aggravate the airways and lungs. These chemicals cling to dust particles in the air and are inhaled into the respiratory tract. This puts a strain on the cilia that line the airways, which are already working overtime trying to clear the excess mucus in the respiratory tract. Therefore, it is best to avoid the use of aerosols. Instead, substitute aerosols with other products that do not disperse chemicals into the air.

Many products, such household cleaners, have aerosol alternatives. Cleaning wipes, for instance, can be used instead of sprays. If you must use aerosols, do so at a time when your family member with CF is not present. Open windows to air out the room where the aerosol was used.

Dust and Vacuum Often

Carpets collect the majority of the dust that becomes airborne. As dust settles and collects within the carpet, the number of dust mites multiplies. When the carpet is walked on, dust, carpet fibers, dust mites and their body parts and feces, are stirred up into the air where they are inhaled and cause respiratory distress.

Dust and vacuum three times per week to decrease the amount of particulates in the air. Using a vacuum with a HEPA filter is best, since they reduce the amount of particulates that return to the air. When dusting, use a damp cloth to trap the dust; a dry cloth will just move the dust around.

If the dusting or vacuuming must be done by the person with CF, wear a dust mask to reduce the inhalation of particulates. Keep small objects, such as knickknacks, in drawers or closed cabinets to minimize the chore of dusting.



Use Exhaust Fans When Cooking

Any type of overheated fat or oil can cause noxious smoke-containing molecules that cause respiratory irritation to be released into the air. When oil is heated, bubbles are formed and burst into the air releasing the noxious irritants. These types of respiratory irritants are especially aggravating to persons with CF. Always turn on your stove's exhaust fan when cooking. If possible, the family member with CF should stay out of the kitchen during cooking.

Clean or Replace Your Shower Curtain

Showering creates a moist environment, which encourages biological pollutants to grow. With each shower, bacteria and mold collect and grow on the shower curtain. During showering, the spores from the mold can become airborne where they can be inhaled and aggravate the respiratory tract. Check your shower curtain at least once per week for mold. If you notice black patches beginning to form, replace your shower curtain or remove it and scrub it with a household cleaner, rinse thoroughly and hang to dry.

Check Your Plants

Avoid over-watering your plants and watch for mold growth on the surface of the soil. If mold appears (white fuzz), re-pot the plants in clean soil or move them outdoors. The spores can become airborne where they can be inhaled and cause respiratory distress. When re-potting, be sure to do so outside and remove all the soil that has mold growth.

Wash or Replace Curtains with Blinds

Curtains, like carpets, are major dust magnets. Each time curtains are opened and closed, dust is released into the air where they can be inhaled and cause irritation to the respiratory tract. If feasible, replace curtains with shades or blinds made of plastic or other washable materials to allow for easy cleaning. If you must use curtains, wash them weekly in hot water. Blinds and shades should be dusted weekly with a damp cloth. For quick and easy cleaning of blinds, close the blinds in one direction, wipe; then close blinds in the other direction and wipe.

Avoid Using Space Heaters

Kerosene and space heaters produce nitrogen dioxide that can irritate your eyes, nose, and throat and cause breathing difficulties, especially in persons with CF. If you use kerosene or space heaters, be sure to keep it adjusted as per the manufacturer's instructions and open a window or turn on an exhaust fan to ventilate any fumes. For safety, install a carbon monoxide detector.

Replace Old Carpet

Carpets are probably the worst household item in the home of persons with CF because they collect particles and distribute them into the air. Furthermore, as carpets wear, the fibers break off and become airborne. Once airborne, these fibers, which are coated with chemicals, enter into the heating system where they burn on the hot surfaces inside the furnace. The burning of the carpets fibers causes toxic gases to be released into the air.



Whether the carpet is old or new, it can drastically affect the breathing in persons with CF. If your home is carpeted, consider replacing the carpet with another type of flooring and use throw rugs that can be laundered often. For more tips on reducing respiratory irritants in your home, visit <http://lungdiseases.about.com> and get the free email course "How to Reduce Respiratory Irritants in Your Home".

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