

Focus on Health

A publication on lung health from
BlueHealth Advantage

WINTER 2012

Have a Healthy, Symptom-Free Holiday

Winter holidays can be hazardous for people with asthma and allergies. A key to controlling the problem is avoiding substances that bring on attacks. Protect yourself from seasonal triggers with these tips.

Trim Tree Troubles

Number one on the list of potential holiday triggers is a live Christmas tree. Evergreens can carry microscopic mold spores and mites. To avoid these allergens, use an uncoated, unscented artificial tree.

If you decide to have a live tree, ask if the retailer has a shaking machine to physically remove mold, dust and other debris from the tree. Once you arrive home, you can treat your tree for mold by wiping the trunk with warm water and bleach—one part bleach to 20 parts lukewarm water. Allow the tree to air out on an enclosed porch or in the garage before bringing it indoors.

Deck the Halls with Care

Decorations and ornaments that have been in storage all year also can harbor mold or be coated with dust. To avoid the problem in the future, thoroughly clean and dry all decorations, seal them in plastic bags and store them in airtight containers.

Other possible triggers to steer clear of include:

- Smoke from fireplaces and wood stoves
- Scented candles, air fresheners and potpourris
- Poinsettias and other fresh flowers
- Unfamiliar foods, if you have food allergies

Holidays also often involve visits to friends and family. Be prepared for reactions to mold, dust and pets by taking along medications. On out-of-town trips, bring a copy of your asthma action plan for emergencies, as well as your doctor's phone number.

take on asthma triggers

Join us for **Asthma 101**, a **free class** that will teach you more about asthma triggers and how to control them. You'll also receive a booklet full of important asthma info. Call BlueHealth Advantage at **877-348-4329** for upcoming dates, times and locations.



Up, Up and Away: Traveling with Oxygen

Flying the friendly skies to visit family over the holidays? If you have chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and use oxygen, you need to make special arrangements. These three tips can help.

1. Plan ahead. To use oxygen during a flight, you may need to send a doctor's letter or other medical form to the airline ahead of time. Make copies to keep with you when you travel. If you'll need supplemental oxygen at your destination, make prior arrangements with a local supplier or your medical equipment company.

2. Know your onboard options. You can't bring your own oxygen tank on the plane, but some airlines can provide one for a fee. Or consider traveling with a portable oxygen concentrator (POC). This device extracts oxygen from the air around you. Airlines don't provide POCs, but you can buy or rent one from your oxygen supplier.

3. Check in early. Have your oxygen prescription, doctor's statement and other paperwork handy, just in case. An oxygen canister, as long as it is empty, can be checked with your luggage. Your POC must have a label saying it is approved by the FAA. You'll also need plenty of battery power—enough to cover your travel time and any delays.

Keep an Eye on Your Asthma

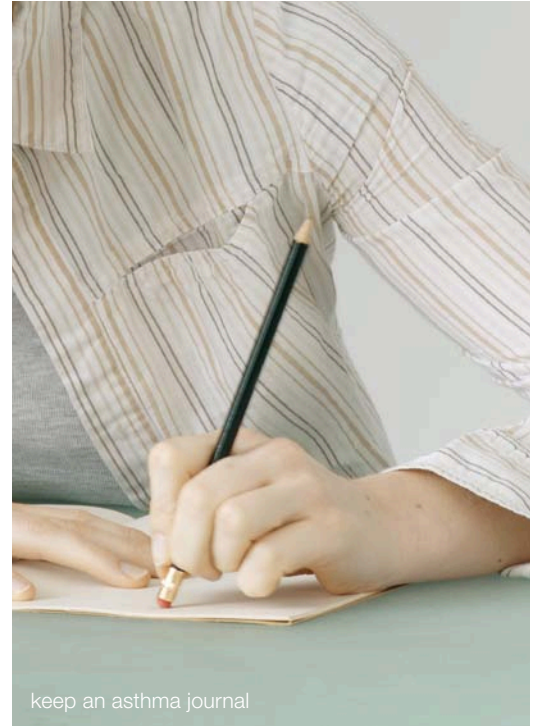
“How are you feeling today?” Nobody can answer that question better than you can.

Keeping track of how you feel is an important step in controlling your asthma. It tells you when your asthma is getting worse so that you can use your quick-relief inhaler. And it helps your doctor judge how well your treatment is working.

Check Your Peak Flow

One way to track your asthma is by checking your peak flow. Your doctor or nurse can show you how to use your peak-flow meter. To understand what your numbers mean, ask your doctor to fill in the blanks below:

- **Green zone.** Doing well. Peak flow is ___ to ___. *Keep up your everyday asthma care.*
- **Yellow zone.** Caution! Getting worse. Peak flow is ___ to ___. *Use your quick-relief inhaler as instructed, and stay away from asthma triggers. Tell your doctor if you are often in your yellow zone.*
- **Red zone.** Danger! Seek help. Peak flow is less than ___. *Use your quick-relief inhaler as instructed, and call your doctor right away.*



keep an asthma journal

- **Daily activities:** Does asthma keep you from going to work, playing sports or other activities?

Keep an Asthma Journal

Start an asthma journal where you can write down your peak-flow numbers and symptoms every day, and take it with you to doctor appointments. It will help your doctor decide if you need any changes in your treatment.

Listen to Your Body

Another way to track your asthma is by paying attention to your symptoms. Get in the habit of assessing how you feel. Watch for these signs that your asthma is worsening:

- **During the day:** Are you bothered by coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath or chest tightness?
- **At night:** Do you wake up at night with these symptoms?
- **Inhaler use:** Do you need to use your quick-relief inhaler?

free asthma guide!

Download and print our free brochure on asthma! It includes a list of common triggers, tips for better breathing and answers to frequently asked questions. Visit BlueHealthAdvantageNE.com, choose “Chronic Conditions” from the Health Library tab and select “Living with Asthma.” The “Download PDF” button is in the top right corner.

Stress Can Aggravate Asthma

Whether it's a public performance, a traffic jam or an illness in the family, you might find it harder to breathe during tense or difficult situations. It's not all in your head: Stress can actually trigger asthma symptoms.

Life will always be full of challenges, large and small. These stress-fighting strategies can help you cope and keep your airways clear:

- 1. Think positively.** View nerve-racking events as opportunities. For instance, if you're concerned about your job, try learning a new skill that will give you an edge.
- 2. Make a plan.** Instead of dwelling on problems, find ways to deal with and overcome them. For instance, if money is the trouble, write down ways your family can manage expenses.
- 3. Go offline.** Just as you reboot a computer when it's slow, taking a break from your routine can refresh your mind and body. Take a vacation if you can, or meditate, garden or lose yourself in a book. Try to find at least 15 minutes a day for the things you enjoy most.

4. Work it out. Exercise is one of the best stress-busters. It loosens tense muscles and produces feel-good chemicals in your body called endorphins. Talk with your doctor if physical activity makes your symptoms worse. Medications, learning a new warm-up method or a different type of exercise could work for you.

5. Get help. If you're truly overwhelmed, visit a psychologist or therapist. He or she can teach you new ways to work through tough times.

how to seek help from a pro

When stress starts to interfere with your happiness or health, it's time to find a behavioral health provider. Start your search at nebraskablue.com. Click on "Find a Doctor" at the top of the page to access a comprehensive list of skilled specialists near you.



save some for lunch tomorrow!

Make Your Own Minestrone

Stressed about this week's menu? Keep it simple with soup.

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 2 medium carrots, sliced
- 1 stalk celery, sliced
- 1 clove garlic (or 1 tsp. garlic flakes)
- 1 tbsp. mixed herbs
- 1 14½-oz. can reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 1 14½-oz. can diced tomatoes, no salt added, plus 1 can water
- 1 19-oz. can cannellini or other beans, no salt added
- ½ cup frozen peas
- 1 cup cooked elbow macaroni

Directions

- In a large pot, heat oil over medium-high heat. Add onion, carrots, celery, garlic and herbs. Cook, stirring, until onions look slightly wilted.
- Add chicken broth, tomatoes, water and beans. Bring to a boil, then turn heat to low and simmer about 10 minutes or until carrots are done.
- Add frozen peas and macaroni to hot soup and serve.

Serves four; each serving provides: Calories 250, Protein 10 g, Fat 4 g, Carbohydrate 41 g, Fiber 10 g, Sodium 404 mg.



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How to Reach Us

When it comes to managing your health, you're never alone. BlueHealth Advantage is your partner on the path to wellness. Program us into your cellphone, PDA or email contacts, and you can call or write whenever you have questions or need support:

Call: 877-348-4329

Fax: 800-255-2838

Email: wellness@bcbsne.com

Write: 1919 Aksarben Drive, P.O. Box 3248,
Omaha, NE 68180-0001

take a look inside!

- 1 Tips for a Healthy, Happy Holiday
- 2 This Action Plan Puts You in Control
- 3 Stressed? 5 Strategies to Help You Cope

DIY
deliciousness
Soup from a can? No way. Try the simple minestrone recipe on page 3 instead.

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Get Smart with Comfort Foods

Winter in the Midwest makes many of us crave comfort foods. Unfortunately, these dishes are often high in fat and calories. Here's how to slim down heart-warming family favorites.

Goodbye, Empty Calories

Consider these ideas to ease up on fat, salt and empty calories:

- If a dip or spread calls for cream cheese, substitute half a cup of ricotta cheese blended with half a cup of fat-free cream cheese. Serve with whole-grain crackers.
- Add creaminess to soups and casseroles with evaporated fat-free milk instead of heavy cream. Bulk up casseroles, stews and soups with beans and vegetables.
- Cradle your pie filling with a crust of crumbled graham crackers instead of pastry dough.
- Cut the butter and oil from baked goods

by using applesauce instead. A half-cup of applesauce equals 1 cup of oil or butter.

Avoid Emotional Eating

If you feel the urge to overindulge:

- Find a way to ease stress that doesn't involve food. Walk outside or retreat to a quiet place in your house.
- Bring healthy snacks, such as raw carrots, to work so that you don't head for the vending machine when it's "crunch time" on a project.
- Give yourself permission to enjoy one or two food favorites during the holidays, such as Mom's sugar cookies. But try to limit other types of temptations.
- Find ways to celebrate the season that don't involve eating. Go window-shopping, listen to holiday tunes or decorate the house to feel more festive.



more smart ideas! For additional healthy eating tips—from the best fast-food picks to building brown-bag lunches—browse the guides at BlueHealthAdvantageNE.com. Choose "Diet and Nutrition" from the Health Library tab at the top of the page.