



## Breathe better home

We spend about 90 percent of our time indoors in homes, schools, offices and public buildings.

A Breathe Better Home has features which reduce triggers and also aid the lifestyle of someone with chronic lung conditions.

A clean air environment will help reduce irritants and allergens in the home. Most features can be incorporated into a new home or adapted in your existing home.

### Allergens and irritants

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The home environment contains many things that can provoke an allergy reaction (asthma, eczema or hay fever) or irritate the lungs. Some examples are:

- Dust mites
- Mould
- Temperature changes
- Humidity
- Irritant particles such as dust and tobacco smoke
- Indoor pollutants such as the by-products of combustion, formaldehyde and volatile organic compounds (VOCs)
- Pet allergens

### Dust mites

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House dust mites thrive in warm, moist environments especially bedding. *For more information on reducing dust mites see our Dust Mite information sheet.*

### Mould

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Mould or mildew can be seen in the home or sometimes you know it is there because of a musty smell. It thrives in moist areas where there is poor ventilation. You can decrease mould growth by:

- Ensuring your home is well ventilated
- Using extractor fans/range hoods in bathrooms, laundries and the kitchen, and ensure clothes-dryers have a vent to the outside
- Removing indoor pot plants as soil can contain mould
- Avoid using bark, organic mulch or compost in the garden
- Keep gutters clean from debris
- Seal leaks from showers and roofs
- Remove visible mould

### Temperature changes and humidity

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Some people's airways are triggered by abrupt changes in temperature or humidity. Ideally the home should be kept at a consistent temperature.

#### Heating

Electric radiant heating products are designed to heat evenly. A non-fan driven heating system is preferable as it does not disturb dust particles and other airborne allergens. Gas heaters must be flued externally.

#### Air Conditioning

Points to consider when choosing air conditioning include, circulation of fresh filtered air versus re-circulated air and methods for the removal of dust, pollen and other foreign matters through effective filters.

All systems should be serviced regularly to maintain efficiency.

### Temperature changes and humidity

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Dust is a particle that irritates the airways and provokes allergy in some people. Dust may contain mould, fibres, dust mites and pet allergens.

A basic strategy to reduce dust exposure is to limit the surfaces on which dust can collect and clean in a way that reduces the disturbance of dust. For example use static-charged materials or damp dusting as opposed to dry-feather dusting. Consider using:

- Closed cupboards rather than open shelves
- Floor to ceiling built-in cupboards and wardrobes rather than free-standing ones
- Upholstered furniture such as leather, vinyl or wood rather than fabric.
- Flooring materials which are easy to clean e.g. polished wood, ceramic tiles, cork, vinyl or slate.
- Storing often-used items where they will not gather dust.
- Wearing a filter mask when cleaning.
- Vacuuming weekly with either a ducted central vacuum with external dust collection points or a vacuum cleaner fitted with a HEPA filter

### Tobacco smoke

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Tobacco smoke contains a complex mixture of chemicals that include cancer-causing substances and respiratory irritants such as sulphur dioxide, formaldehyde and ammonia. Declare your home 'Smoke Free'.

# Breathe better home (continued)

## Indoor air pollutants

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Chemical fumes from building materials, furnishings, paints, varnishes, adhesives and burning gases can be potent triggers for some people and exposure to these should be minimised wherever possible. Consult stockists for low-allergen alternatives.

Outdoor air pollutants will enter the home as a result of natural air flow and ventilation. For information and strategies to reduce exposure to air pollutants see our Asthma and Air Pollution information sheet.

## Pet allergen

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Allergens are found in pet's saliva, hair, urine and dander (dead skin flakes). These allergens are carried in the air on very small particles which you cannot see. The pets' hair and dander settles on carpets and upholstery.

*For information on reducing pet allergen in the home see our Pets and Allergy information sheet.*

## General features of a Breathe Better Home

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### Cooking Appliances

The use of an electric oven, hot plates and appliances overcome any problems associated with gas emissions.

### Window Coverings

External blinds and shutters are preferred to drapes. Vertical and rollers blinds are also suitable. If recessed into the window the use of a pelmet is avoided, otherwise build pelmets to the ceiling to reduce surfaces on which dust will settle.

### Floor Coverings

Whilst the recommendation is for hard flooring as it is easier to clean, there is some conflicting evidence. Recent research suggests that there is less disturbance of dust mite allergen from carpet due to it being 'trapped' in the carpet, but the health benefit has yet to be proven. Discuss your situation and allergies with your doctor.

Scatter rugs which can be hung out in the sunlight and beaten to remove dust mites and allergens are ideal. If carpet is preferred it is beneficial to use short pile carpets as they are easier to clean than the twist or loop pile.

Synthetics are thought to have a lower moisture content than wool, making them less conducive to dust mite growth. Steam cleaning every 12 to 18 months is an effective cleaning method to remove allergens. Rapid drying within 24 hours is vital to minimise any mould growth.

## Insulation

International research shows because insulation manages temperatures and moisture it is important for improving respiratory health in homes.

Be careful with your choice of insulation materials as some contain formaldehyde, and di-isocyanates that can irritate airways. Insulated areas should be completely sealed to ensure that no airborne particles enter the living space.

Where insulation areas are not sealed, foil or polyester batts may be the best option.

## Furniture

Leather and vinyl coverings are easier to clean and impervious to dust mites as opposed to fabric upholstery. Cane and rattan seats do not provide an environment conducive to mite growth. Removable cushions may be added as they are easy to clean.

## Outside the home

See our Breathe Better Garden and Breathe Better Plants information sheets for more information.

## More information

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For more information contact  
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