Outdoor Air Quality and Adult Asthma

Poor air quality is unhealthy for everyone, but especially for people with asthma. Poor air quality can be a trigger for your asthma — and can make symptoms come on faster and stronger. When the Air Quality Report says that people in sensitive groups should take action, this includes people with asthma. Here’s how poor air quality can affect you:

When AQI is:

1–50  **GOOD**

Worse asthma symptoms

Enjoy usual outdoor activities

Consider reducing outdoor exercise — not as long, not as hard

If you have symptoms, stay indoors

51–100  **MODERATE**

More severe respiratory infections

More missed work or school

More hospital visits

LATER

Permanent lung damage, higher risk of lung cancer and early death

101–150  **UNHEALTHY**  for sensitive groups

151–200  **UNHEALTHY**

201–300  **VERY UNHEALTHY**

The Air Quality Index (AQI) is a number for reporting how clean or unhealthy your air is every day. You can find it on the Internet at AirNow.gov. It’s also reported in local news sources:

When AQI is:  **1–50 GOOD**

Enjoy usual outdoor activities

When AQI is:  **51–100 MODERATE**

Consider reducing outdoor exercise — not as long, not as hard

If you have symptoms, stay indoors

When AQI is:  **101–150 UNHEALTHY**  for sensitive groups

Reduce or avoid outdoor exercise

Plan necessary outdoor activities at times of day when air quality is better (usually morning)

Avoid exposure to outdoor air in places with a lot of traffic

When AQI is:  **151–200 UNHEALTHY**

Keep your fast-acting inhaler nearby (such as albuterol) — and contact your doctor if you’re using it often

When AQI is:  **201–300 VERY UNHEALTHY**

Avoid all outdoor exercise
What causes poor air quality

Particulate matter is tiny particles in the air like dust, dirt, soot, and smoke. In northern Utah, it’s more common and more problematic in winter months. Symptoms may come several hours after exposure.

Ground-level ozone forms when polluted air comes in contact with heat and sunlight. This is more common in summer months and late in the day. Symptoms usually come right away.

Particulate matter in your lungs

Particulate matter is sometimes reported as PM 2.5 or PM 10

PM 2.5 particles are extremely tiny. They can get deep into your lungs and cause inflammation. This makes breathing more difficult.

PM 10 particles are a bit bigger. They include things like dust, pollen, and mold. Your nose and airways can filter some of these before they reach your lungs.

Take action

Ask your doctor to add air quality to your Asthma Action Plan. Ask about when to adjust your controller medications.

Listen to your body
Get to know your own responses at different AQI levels — and when you need to change your plans.

Get to know your neighborhood
Pay attention to places and times of day where air quality affects you most.

Learn more
Get more information about what you can do to help improve air quality — both outdoors and in your home.

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