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.

Here's how poor air quality can affect you:

### The Air Quality Index (AQI)

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:

- **1–50** GOOD
  - Enjoy usual outdoor activities
- **51–100** MODERATE
  - Consider reducing outdoor exercise — not as long, not as hard
  - If you have symptoms, stay indoors
- **101–150** UNHEALTHY for sensitive groups
  - Reduce or avoid outdoor exercise
- **151–200** UNHEALTHY
  - Avoid all outdoor exercise
- **201–300** VERY UNHEALTHY

### When AQI is:

**1–50** GOOD
- Enjoy usual outdoor activities

**51–100** MODERATE
- Consider reducing outdoor exercise — not as long, not as hard
- If you have symptoms, stay indoors

**101–150** UNHEALTHY for sensitive groups
- Reduce or avoid outdoor exercise

**151–200** UNHEALTHY
- Avoid all outdoor exercise

**201–300** VERY UNHEALTHY
- Keep your fast-acting inhaler nearby (such as albuterol) — and contact your doctor if you’re using it often
- Whenever possible, avoid outdoor air in places with a lot of traffic
- Going even a few blocks away can help
**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** is a colorless gas. It 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. Even a face mask won’t keep them out of your airways. They can get deep into your lungs and cause inflammation.

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

Inflammation in your lungs narrows your airways and makes breathing difficult.

**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.