



HEALTH NEWS FROM DR. YU

Thurston County Public Health & Social Services Department

Women's Health & Asthma

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Take a deep breath in. Then breathe out. Then another deep breath in and out again. It seems like an easy thing. But if you have asthma, this simple act can be difficult. If you are also pregnant, your ability to breathe freely makes a world of difference to you and your baby.

Asthma is one of the most common chronic diseases among pregnant women. Asthma causes frequent episodes of coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath and a tight feeling in your chest. This can limit the amount of air that gets into your lungs. If you're not getting enough air, neither is your unborn baby.

Asthma may hurt you and your growing fetus. Poorly controlled asthma is linked to pregnancy-related high blood pressure, increased stress on the body, early labor, and an increased likelihood of having a cesarean delivery. Your baby might be born too early, have low birth weight or have some limiting of its growth inside the womb. The good news is harm can be greatly reduced by keeping asthma in good control.

The best time to get asthma under control is before becoming pregnant. Usually, asthma can be controlled by getting regular medical care, following doctor's orders, and avoiding asthma triggers. Since half of all pregnancies in Thurston County are unplanned, making better health a goal could benefit both a woman and her baby.

To reduce risks of having an asthma attack, clear your home and surroundings of things that most affect you. Smoke and particulate matter are irritants that affect everyone at risk for asthma.

- **Tobacco smoke** from cigarettes, cigars and pipes contain dangerous chemicals even if you are not the one smoking. Avoid all tobacco smoke, do not allow smoke inside your home or car, and ask others not smoke when they are near you.
 - If you smoke or live with someone who does and wants to quit, contact the Washington State Quit Line at 1-800-QUIT-LINE or www.quitline.com. They can send free resources to help.
- **Avoid pollution**, wood burning stoves, and fireplaces, as the particulate matter produced can be irritating to the lungs.

For individuals who are allergic or have sensitivities, the following are common asthma triggers.

- **Dust and dust mites** frequently trigger asthma attacks. Dust mites thrive in soft-surfaced objects, like pillows, sofas, and clothes. Damp dust frequently, use a high-filtering vacuum, wash clothes and blankets in hot water, and put dust-proof covers on pillows and mattresses.
- **Reduce mold** by removing excessive moisture or fixing leaks, using the exhaust fan while bathing, allowing plenty of airflow, and drying surfaces if they become wet.
- **Pet dander** can cause asthma attacks. Keep pets out of your bedroom or consider keeping pets outdoors more.
- **Debris from pests** such as cockroaches and rodents can trigger asthma. Don't leave food or garbage out. Keep food in airtight containers.
- **Avoid strong odors**, perfumes, air fresheners, and chemical cleaning products, which can trigger asthma attacks.

A new grant from the Office on Women's Health supports Thurston County's work to address this and other women's health issues. Visit:

www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/admin/initiatives/womenshealth.html

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