

THE ALLERGY & ASTHMA CLINIC

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NEWSLETTER

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Is the winter holiday season triggering your allergies instead of your holiday spirit?

During the holiday season many people experience an increase in their allergy or asthma symptoms and the number of people visiting doctor's offices are increasing every year during the holiday season according to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology.

Winter and holiday allergies can be equal, if not worse, than other seasonal allergies. During the winter season air circulation tends to be stagnant because doors and windows are closed to prevent the cold air from entering. Un-circulated air causes allergens to build up providing a breeding ground for allergy attacks. In some homes raising the thermostat, using furnaces or stoves to keep warm, can trigger allergies for many people. In the winter season people spend more time indoors, exposed frequently to mold, dust mites, Christmas trees, as well as your pets may tend to stay in more to stay warm.

There are a variety of things during the winter and holiday months that can cause allergy symptoms such as real Christmas trees, wreaths, holiday greenery, artificial decorations, potpourri and candles. The trick to making the holidays more enjoyable is keeping symptoms to a minimum. Here are some helpful holiday hints that should help you avoid a trip to the doctor's office:

Live Christmas Trees and garland gives off a fresh woody odor to which many people are allergic. Commercially sold trees may also have been sprayed to help them stay green but a spray that may cause respiratory symptoms. Hosing down a live tree with water before bringing it in can help reduce allergens. Artificial Trees and Decorations – because these are stored for a long period of time, these are often dusty and therefore a source of dust mites. These should be dusted outside before decorating. Use a hand held hand dryer set on cool.

After decorating your tree – in the vicinity of your tree, place an air filter in the room

using a HEPA filter. Alternatively, dust mite control sprays can often be used on trees while they are on display.

Storing Decorations – never use paper or newspaper when wrapping your decorations. This may harbor paper mites causing allergy triggers next year when the decorations are unpacked. Store your decorations in plastic.

Winter heating systems – Before turning on the heat for the season, change your furnace filters. Also, forced air heat and wood stoves can create low humidity causing many people to develop respiratory problems. Replace moisture in the air with humidifiers but make sure these are maintained to prevent mold and bacterial growth and make sure you keep the humidity below 40% to slow down mold growth; or you may want to just consider putting an inch of water in the sink and bathtubs or simply place a pot of water on the stove. Drink more water to prevent dry skin and to keep your nose, sinuses and lungs from becoming dry.

Potpourri and Candles – Many people are sensitive to the floral odors and allergic to mold spores that may come from dried vegetation in potpourri. Consider making your own potpourri blend of cinnamon, cloves, vanilla or peppermint. Avoid scented candles as these can also trigger allergy symptoms and even an asthma attack.

Fallen leaves – If you must rake leaves, wear a mask. People whose eyes itch when raking leaves may want to wear a pair of swimmers goggles to protect their eyes from allergy causing mold spores.

Cozy fires in the fireplace – Make sure there is adequate draft for the stove or fireplace. The person with allergies should not be in the room when a fire is being built. Wood bark can accumulate mold, put wood directly into the fire and do not stack wood in the house. Persons allergic to tree pollen may also be allergic to the wood when it is burned. The wood people are least likely to react to is oak.

A pet from Santa – Children who grow up with pets do appear to be happier and healthier as long as they are not allergic to the pet. If there is a family tendency

towards allergy to pet dander and fur bearing pets, before considering getting a new puppy, kitty, rabbit or guinea pig for Christmas, you may consider allergy testing to make sure the person isn't allergic. How sad it is for a child to get a new pet only to find they are allergic to it. But symptoms can decrease if the animal is kept in a specific area of the home and preferably where there is no carpet and not allowed on furniture and in bedrooms. Additionally regularly bathing cats and dogs, as well as their bedding, can reduce symptoms.

Stuffed Toys – Avoid stuffed animals with real fur. Also, stuffed animals may be filled with dusty or moldy foam strips. It is best if the stuffed animal is polyester filled and washable. Check the label for filling and washing instructions. Another alternative to decrease dust mites is placing the stuffed toy in a plastic bag and putting it in the freezer overnight or place the toy in a clothes dryer set on high for 30 minutes.

Holiday Stress – The immune system is powerfully affected by stress. Holiday stress from celebrations, over eating, alcohol consumption, and interruption of normal sleep patterns can worsen allergy and asthma symptoms. Getting regular rest and slowing down the pace of the holiday celebration promotes good health to help us enjoy the holiday season.

Immunotherapy – During the busy holiday season, it is important to continue to make the time to stay on track with your immunotherapy treatments. Just because spring isn't in the air, doesn't mean allergens aren't. Continuing your immunotherapy treatments will help keep you feeling healthy allowing your holiday spirit to shine through.

We wish you all a wonderful and healthy holiday season filled with family and friends!!

Holiday Office Schedule:

Friday, Dec 23 9am - 5pm

Saturday, Dec 24 - Closed

Monday, Dec 26 - Closed

Friday, Dec 30 9am - 5pm

Saturday, Dec 31 9am - 12pm

Monday, Jan 2 - Closed