Spring Cleaning Helps With Allergies and Asthma

Coughing, sneezing, congestion, sore throat and trouble breathing…these are many of the symptoms people who suffer from allergies and asthma experience with the arrival of spring. However, spring cleaning can help reduce allergy and asthma triggers in your home.

Dirt, dust and other allergens tend to collect over the winter. This can lead to a potentially dangerous build up in your home. Here are some spring cleaning tips to try to keep your allergies and asthma under control:

- Dust. Use a damp cloth and be sure to wear a mask while cleaning. Dusting can control the amount of dust mites in your home.
- Clear out old belongings to cut down on dust throughout the house.
- Clean your shower, including the curtain and in the corners, with bleach-based products to kill mold and mildew.
- Clean your curtains and blinds throughout your home.
- Vacuum and steam clean your carpet weekly. This will reduce surface dust mites.
- Change or clean all old filters such as on air conditioners or air purifiers.
- Wash your sheets and bedclothes weekly in hot water.
- Encase mattresses and pillows in mite-proof covers.
- Limit the amount of plants in your home. Your plants may be carrying mold or pollen.
- If you have pets, keep them out of your bedroom and make sure they stay clean. This can help reduce the amount of allergen in the dead skin they shed.

Often, the same things that cause allergies also do the same for asthma. Taking your medicine, avoiding allergy and asthma triggers, and thoroughly cleaning your home are all keys to staying healthy this spring.

My Allergies and Asthma Are Better

“When I was a little kid and was not on medication I was sick a lot and had to go to the doctor. I have allergies and asthma. Now that I am on medicine, my allergies and asthma are controlled. When spring comes the pollen goes up my nose and my eyes get watery. During spring, pollen comes out and I have to stay inside. I only had one asthma attack last year. Sometimes I even forget that I have asthma because I feel good now.”

Kalantae Chase, 9, has learned how to deal with his allergies and asthma especially during the spring season.
Praise For Priority Partners

Josh Campbell

Third-year college student Josh Campbell was just following the advice that medical experts give during flu season. Josh received a flu shot only to end up with Guillain-Barre syndrome, a rare side effect of the flu shot. Guillain-Barre syndrome is a disorder that occurs when the body’s immune system mistakenly attacks part of the nervous system, leading to nerve inflammation that causes muscle weakness.

Josh was diagnosed with the disorder last March. Later in 2010, a professional recommended Priority Partners because Josh was under insured. Josh has been pleased with Priority Partners, specifically with the transportation service it provides and the low-cost medication. Priority Partners provides Josh with transportation to his doctor’s appointments.

“Priority Partners has made it easy for me to get to my appointments and has made medication affordable,” Josh said. “Since I’m a college student, that’s huge.”

Wanda Jackson

Soon after Wanda Jackson moved from Lubbock Texas, to Frederick, Md., she recognized that living without health insurance was risky. Wanda kept hearing about Priority Partners and eventually decided to become a member.

Obtaining health insurance through Priority Partners has paid off. Wanda has had heart problems over the years. She has suffered a total of four strokes; two severe, and two mild, since 2007. Since joining Priority Partners in 1998, Wanda has benefited from the services provided. Wanda’s medical services are taken care of, her case manager has remained in touch with her and she even was offered a position on Priority Partners’ Consumer Advisory Board, which has been a real thrill.

“It hit me all of the sudden; it was scary not having insurance,” Wanda said. “The people have been really friendly. I love Priority Partners and I have no complaints.”

Anthony Mitchell

As a diabetic, Anthony Mitchell has enough to worry about medically. Under Anthony’s previous health insurance provider, he felt that his basic needs were taken care of, but something was missing. Anthony found that missing piece when he became a Priority Partners member. Priority Partners not only provides great benefits, but more efficient service, according to the Bel Air resident.

Anthony has taken advantage of doctor’s and hospital visits, transportation to doctor’s appointments and wound care. In addition, Priority Partners provides Anthony with a special needs coordinator. Any concern Anthony has, his special needs coordinator takes care of it. Anthony is grateful that Priority Partners has simplified his life.

“Priority Partners has provided and helped me with insurance to take care of the things that I wouldn’t have been able to do on my own,” Anthony said. “Without them I wouldn’t have been able to heal.”

Pharmacy Corner: OTC Medications for Allergy Symptoms

Is your new growth of flowers, trees and grass this spring causing congestion, sneezing, sore throat or itchy eyes? If so, you might be experiencing seasonal allergies. Seasonal allergies, also called hay fever, affect one in five people in the United States and peak during the spring and fall. The best way to reduce seasonal allergy symptoms is to avoid triggers. If you continue to experience symptoms, there are a variety of over-the-counter and prescription medications available for seasonal allergies.

Saline nasal products, antihistamines and decongestants are available over-the-counter for treatment of allergy symptoms. Saline nasal irrigations rinse allergens from the nose, reducing irritation and mucus buildup. These products are a good choice if you’re looking for a natural treatment.

Decongestants are available as oral tablets (Sudafed, etc) or nasal sprays (Afrin). Decongestants reduce nasal symptoms by lessening stuffiness and congestion. People with high blood pressure or heart conditions should avoid decongestants, and nasal spray decongestants should be used for no more than three days.

Antihistamines block the body’s reaction to allergens, so they work best if taken prior to exposure to allergens. Newer antihistamines like Claritin cause less sedation than older antihistamines such as Benadryl. Antihistamines are often sold in combination products with decongestants and cough medications.

Priority Partners covers several over-the-counter allergy products, including generics for Claritin, Zyrtec, and Sudafed, with a prescription from your doctor. If over-the-counter products aren’t enough, ask your doctor for additional recommendations for treatment of your allergy symptoms.
On behalf of Priority Partners, WB&A Market Research was selected by the State of Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) to conduct the annual Consumer Assessment of HealthCare Providers and Systems (CAHPS®) survey. A random sample of Priority Partners Managed Care Organization (PPMCO) members were asked to rate their satisfaction with their provider’s timeliness, quality of service, and the Plan overall. This year, PPMCO members rated the Health Plan at 71 percent which was higher than the Health Choice’s aggregate score of 67 percent.

Although there were no other significant changes in the rates compared to 2009, the survey indicated that several areas offered opportunities for improvement. The information from the survey will be incorporated into PPMCO’s continuous quality improvement process as we monitor and refine all aspects of the program so that we can best meet your health care needs.

Johns Hopkins HealthCare’s (JHHC) Member Satisfaction Surveys will be conducted again in the spring of 2011. We ask that if you are contacted either by phone or by mail, that you please respond so that we can evaluate the impact of our improvement efforts.
Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, HealthLINK@Hopkins gives members easy access to their health information through the internet. Members can find a doctor, request a new ID card, monitor their medications and illnesses, send messages to Customer Service and more.

To learn more, call 1-800-654-9728 or go to www.ppmco.org to register today.
Avoiding Asthma Attacks When Pregnant

As spring brings warmer weather, people tend to spend more time outside. Spring can also bring an increase in asthma symptoms. Asthma is the tightening of breathing airways which causes shortness of breath, coughing and/or wheezing. Asthma symptoms can be triggered by various things such as head colds, allergens, and exercise.

Pregnant women who have asthma need to be aware of what causes their asthma symptoms. There are ways to reduce having an asthma attack:

- Avoid things that cause asthma symptoms (any kind of smoke or pollen).
- Take your asthma medication as ordered by your doctor.
- Drink six to eight glasses of water each day.
- Exercise only if your asthma is under control.

Exercise in pregnancy is good for making your muscles stronger, and can make your labor and delivery easier. It can help fight colds, reduce lower back pains, help your mood, and prevent extra weight gain. Pregnant women should get at least 30 minutes of activity every day. Suggested activities include walking, swimming, dancing, yoga and cycling. Before you start any exercise plan, talk to your OB (obstetrician) doctor to see if you can work out during your pregnancy.

Pregnant women should avoid activities that can put you or your baby at risk of injury. Avoid activities such as riding horses, skiing, soccer, tennis, or volleyball. Avoid any activities that add to the risk of hitting or falling on your pregnant belly. Stop working out and call your OB doctor right away if you notice:

- Tightening up of the uterus
- Dizziness, chest pains or headaches
- Vaginal bleeding or leaking of amniotic fluid
- Feeling less fetal movement

You should drink extra water when working out. A healthy human body is made up of over 70 percent water. Some of this water is lost when you urinate, breathe, or sweat. That is why it is important to drink six to eight glasses of water, especially when you are pregnant and active. Dehydration can cause contractions.

Taking care of yourself is the best thing you can do for you and your baby.

Health Education

Did you know that you qualify for FREE health education programs as part of your Priority Partners benefit? You can attend FREE health education classes focusing on adult and childhood asthma, diabetes, prenatal care, well child, smoking cessation and chronic disease management. Classes are customized to fit your needs. To find classes in your area, call toll-free 1-800-957-9760.

QUESTIONS?

If you have questions, or would like more information about your Priority Partners benefits, please call one of the numbers below:

Customer Service
800-654-9728

Outreach
888-500-8786

Health Education
800-957-9760

Mental Health Services
800-888-1965

Substance Abuse Services
800-261-2429

Vision Benefits
800-428-8789

DentaQuest Benefits
(formerly called Doral Dental)
888-696-9596

Priority Partners Website
www.ppmco.org

For a copy of
Your Health Matters
in Spanish,
call 800-654-9728

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Child Anxiety Prevention Study
Point of Contact: Golda Ginsburg, Ph.D
443-287-4349 CAPS@jhmi.edu

Older Adults & Caregivers: Multiple Medical Conditions in the Elderly
Point of Contact: Travonia Hughes, Ph.D
410-550-5829 thughe17@jhmi.edu

Prevention/Slowing of Diabetic Neuropathy
and Treatment of Pain in Diabetic Neuropathy
Point of Contact: Nicolas Cimino
443-287-0589 ncimino1@jhmi.edu

Health Guide: Tailoring Educational Interventions for Home-Dwelling CHF Patients
Point of Contact: Jennifer Ronald
410-614-6996 jronald1@jhmi.edu

While Priority Partners encourages the support of, and participation in medical research generally, Priority Partners makes no recommendation about participation in any specific research project. Before agreeing to participate in any research projects, ask questions and investigate to reach your own conclusion.
**It’s Time to Re-apply:**

**Don’t Lose Your Health Benefits**

If it’s time for you to renew your Priority Partners health care coverage, and you need help with your redetermination forms, visit Chrissy, our member advocate. Chrissy will be at the locations listed below from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. She can answer your questions and help you fill out your forms, at no cost. See you soon!

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More dates and locations are coming. Visit [www.ppmco.org](http://www.ppmco.org) to learn more.