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SENSE AND SENSITIVITY: LIVING WELL WITH ASTHMA & ALLERGIES

* We all look for shortcuts to help us with routine chores— cooking, cleaning, gardening, etc. But if you have asthma or allergies, there is something to consider: **many of the products we use to speed our housekeeping chores consist of chemicals that irritant asthma or can even cause asthma symptoms.**

* The **chemicals most used in cleaning products**, Formaldehyde, Ammonia, Sodium Lauryl Sulphate, D-Limonene and Sodium Hypochlorite, are not true allergens, but they **can be irritants and unhealthy for anyone but especially dangerous to those with asthma or allergies.**

* For those with asthma, whose lungs are in an irritated condition under normal circumstances, these strong chemicals found in almost all commercial cleaning products can exacerbate symptoms - even causing a flare-up.

* For those with **respiratory allergies, breathing these chemicals can cause symptoms** like congestion, rhinitis, red, burning or itchy eyes, wheezing, headaches, coughing or even disorientation. People with eczema might also break out in a rash when coming into contact with these harsh chemicals. As with any irritant, reactions will vary from person to person from mildly annoying to actually debilitating. How do these toxic chemicals get in our homes?

* **Formaldehyde** is used in furniture polishes, disinfectants, mildew cleaners, dish and laundry detergents – as well as in pressed wood, the same wood used to make a lot of our furnishings. These products can cause lung and skin irritation.

* **Ammonia** is found in many all-purpose cleaners, drain cleaners, oven cleaners, even some dish soaps and fabric softeners and certainly glass/window cleaners. These products can irritate lungs, skin and eyes.

* **Sodium Lauryl Sulphate** is used in many dish and laundry detergents and can irritate the skin.

* **D-Limonene** is a citrus-based solvent (orange oil) and is in all those citrus aroma cleaners and polishes. For asthmatics these can cause serious respiratory distress and may also be a skin irritant for many people.

* **Sodium Hypochlorite** is a disinfectant commonly known as chlorine bleach and can be found not only as pure bleach but also in mildew removers and some laundry detergents and cleansers. Inhaling bleach can irritant lungs as well as irritate skin.

* If you think rushing out to buy “natural,” “organic” or “eco-friendly” cleaning products is the answer to avoid these chemicals, think again. **Many “natural” products contain some of these chemicals** because these chemical are found in nature. **BUT there are some non-toxic cleaning substitutes** which *normally* won't cause irritation.

* For **All Purpose Cleaners**: make a paste of vinegar and salt as a counter surface cleaner, good for most countertops, but always check manufacturer for any precautions. Or, dissolve 4 teaspoons baking soda in 1 qt. of warm water and use as a general cleaner. Baking soda can also be used directly on a damp sponge instead of abrasive cleansers. It will deodorize and clean most kitchen and bathroom surfaces.

* To **clean fruits and vegetables**, wash them in a large bowl of cool water with 2-3 tablespoons of dissolved baking soda. Rinse well. Many feel this method removes pesticides as well as dirt and wax.

* Tried and true **Floor Cleaners**: *for no-wax floors*, but not wood, add ½ cup white vinegar to a bucket of warm water and wash as usual for sparkling clean floors; *for Linoleum floors*: damp mop daily with a mild detergent to keep clean. To preserve the surface, you could add a capful of baby oil to the mop water. *For Wood Floors* mix 1 teaspoon of Washing Soda in 1 gallon of hot water and wash with mop or sponge. This will also remove mildew from floors. *For Brick or Stone Floors* mix 1 cup vinegar in 1 gallon of water, scrub with a brush, rinse with clear water. *For Ceramic Tile Floors* washing with soap in hard water areas leaves a film so instead, use ¼ cup white vinegar in 1 gallon of water.

* **For a Drain Cleaner**, prevention is the best cleaner: use a drain trap to collect hair or food particles before they cause a problem and don't pour grease down the drains – instead, use an old jar or metal coffee can with lid to collect the grease then dispose of it properly. To help prevent greasy build-up, once a week pour a kettle of boiling water down the drain or put some vinegar or baking soda down the drain to break down the fats and keep the drains smelling sweeter. Don't use these methods right after using a commercial drain cleaner - it could cause an explosion.

* **Oven Cleaner**: While the oven is still warm, sprinkle some salt on the spill. If the spill is completely dry, sprinkle some water on it then sprinkle the salt. When the oven cools, scrape away the spill and then wash the area clean. To prevent a messy oven, put a sheet of aluminum foil on the oven floor beneath the coils, but be careful not to touch the heating element. Throw away the foil when spills occur and replace with a clean sheet of foil. Or place baking pans or casserole dishes on a cookie sheet to catch spills.

* Be a safe and smart housekeeper; read labels carefully to avoid toxic chemical irritants. For more info, ask AAFA-TX.

Upcoming Free AAFA-TX Programs: **1) June 8** – “Asthma Management and Education”, a CE program for nurses, School Nurse Institute, Waco. Pre-registration required. **2) June 9** – “Asthma & allergy Essentials for Childcare Providers” Kids R Kids, Houston, Sarah Nelson, instructor. **3) Asthma Camps within Texas:** June 3-6, Corpus Christi; June 10-15, 17-22, San Antonio; June 19-22, San Angelo; July 8-13, Houston; Aug. 5-10, Dallas. **4) June 20** – “Tools To Manage Asthma & Allergies”, Worksite Wellness Program, Blockbuster Corporate, Dallas, Dr. Eric Schmitt, presenting. **5) June 27** – “Tools To Manage Asthma & Allergies”, Worksite Wellness Program, Blockbuster Corporate, McKinney, Dr. John Meiser, presenting. For more information, contact AAFA-TX

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