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Cooking With Asthma Control in Mind

Learn about cooking techniques and proper ventilation for better asthma control in your home.

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Many people don't know that the simple act of preparing a meal can trigger **asthma**. That's why the first step when cooking if you or someone in your family has asthma is recognizing the hidden breathing hazards in your kitchen.

Asthma Control: Cutting Down on Fumes

When it comes to cooking with asthma, the key is to keep cooking fumes at low levels. "Any kind of combustion produces gases and particles that can provoke respiratory disease, including asthma," says Gregory Diette, MD, associate professor of medicine and epidemiology, Center for Global Health, Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, Md. "Cooking is just one of many forms of combustion. The particles that are small enough to make it down into the airways and into the lungs and some of the gases, such as nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), can also trigger

asthma symptoms."

Asthma Control: Cooking on a Gas Stove

Smoke from burned food isn't the only problem for asthma control. Gas from gas stoves is also a concern, says Diette. Gas stoves release nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), a potent asthma trigger. Diette was part of a research team that looked at how far NO₂ could spread in the homes of 150 preschool children who had asthma. They found that even if a child's bedroom was on a different floor of the house, away from the kitchen, levels of NO₂ from gas stoves were high enough to trigger asthma — and that **children** living in a home with a gas stove were more likely to have asthma symptoms. "We know that electric stoves don't produce NO₂ and natural gas stoves do," says Diette. "What I am telling people is, if you have a choice to put in one or the other, you should probably opt for the electric one."

Asthma Control: Proper Ventilation

Another important factor when you're cooking in a house where someone has asthma is how well ventilated your kitchen is. "Make sure you have proper ventilation, like a range hood, to vent the fumes out of the home," advises Diette. "Having open windows is probably better than nothing, especially if there is good cross ventilation." The key is to move the cooking fumes out of the home. A fan can also be useful, but only if it helps to move the air outside faster, rather than just stirring it up in the kitchen or living areas.

Asthma Control: Avoiding Combustion-Fueled Cooking

Diette advises avoiding types of cooking that interfere with good asthma control, such as grilling. Grilling or barbecuing in the summer or roasting chestnuts on an open fire in the winter may sound like fun, but for someone with asthma, these experiences can be anything but relaxing. "Charcoal and wood, anything with combustion, is an issue, and we know for sure that smoke from any source can trigger asthma," says Diette. Your best bet is to avoid such smoky activities or find out from your primary care

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physician or [allergist](#) how to prepare for your response to these triggers.

Healthy Cooking With Asthma

Don't worry if you can't run out and exchange your gas stove for an electric one. There are other less expensive options for preparing healthy hot meals. "I would recommend using a non-stick table top electric skillet or grill, a toaster oven, or the microwave to avoid fumes from gas appliances or charred foods on a grill," advises Lona Sandon, RD, assistant professor of clinical nutrition, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

With awareness and a few smart precautions, [healthy cooking](#) that does not interfere with asthma control is possible and can easily become second nature to you.

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