COPD and Scented Products

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Fragrance-Free Living

Any scents can trigger respiratory symptoms and aggravate diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and asthma. The reason is simple: they are inhaled (via the respiratory route) and, therefore, will irritate the trachea and lungs, which are already inflamed and damaged by lung disease. Let's take a look at COPD and scented products.

Any scents from fragrances to air fresheners, deodorizers, shampoos, cosmetic products and household items such as fabric softeners and cleaning products can trigger a COPD flare up. There are over 10,000 ingredients that can be used in personal care products, with many people using around 500 chemicals daily.

Why Do Scented Products Cause Flare-Ups?

Try reading the label of a cosmetic product or a detergent and you will see a long list of ingredients. Among the ingredients, you will also see those scented chemicals. One fragrance can have as many as 350 scented ingredients, usually a combination of natural and artificial chemicals.

These ingredients are inhaled and absorbed through the skin, triggering various reactions in your body. In some cases, you may notice a worsening of your symptoms, while in other cases, you can get serious allergic reactions (such as anaphylactic shock). The most common symptoms of being sensitive to scented products include feeling fatigued or nauseated, headaches and the dreaded COPD dizzy spells.

Cold-like symptoms can also be experienced. Both artificial and natural chemicals can trigger allergic reactions, and often the culprit is not only the scent but other chemicals from the ingredient list as well.

If you have COPD, you may notice an aggravation of your symptoms: increased shortness of breath, fatigue, cough, wheezing and changes in the color of your sputum.

More Details Regarding the Ingredients

Almost all (as many as 95 percent) of the ingredients are synthetic. They turn into vapors and attach to your hair, skin, clothing and environment. Most of them are toxic since they are derived from petroleum — for example, benzene or aldehydes.

Diethyl phthalate is another toxic ingredient linked with allergic skin reactions (dermatitis) and issues with the reproductive system. It is often added not because of its smell but because it makes a fragrance last longer.

What About Unscented Products?

You may notice that the list of ingredients is shorter, but many products labeled “fragrance-free” or “unscented”

contain some chemicals that mask the scent of other ingredients.

Health Canada has specific rules, and no company can claim that a product is fragrance-free or unscented unless there are no fragrances added to that product and no chemicals that mask the scents included in the product.

Read the labels carefully and stay away from some of the most common and toxic ingredients such as alpha hydroxy acids (AHA) and beta hydroxy acids, aluminum, benzyl alcohol and isopropyl alcohol, butylated hydroxy anisole (BHA) and butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT), 1,4-dioxane, DMDM hydantoin, diazolidinyl urea and imidazolidinyl urea, FD&C colors, and many more.

Go Green

Buying environmentally friendly products or making your own is even better. Natural ingredients such as baking soda, vinegar or lemon can successfully replace most cleaning products. When it comes to personal care and cosmetics, choose true, real, scent-free products.