

# B***better*** Breathing

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## How to Beat Spring Allergies

While many eagerly await the first signs of spring, the budding trees and growing grass can mean a season of sneezing and wheezing for millions of allergy sufferers.

Spring allergies, also called seasonal allergic rhinitis, affect as many as 30 percent of adults and up to 40 percent of children. Common symptoms include:

- sneezing
- stuffy or runny nose
- sore throat
- itchy or watery eyes
- fatigue

If you're asthma is triggered by allergies, you also may have symptoms of wheezing, a tight feeling in the chest, difficulty breathing or coughing.

These symptoms are typically caused by pollen from the trees and grasses. These tiny grains get released into the air beginning as early as January and lasting all the way until June depending on where you live.

These allergies are more than just a nuisance. They are serious diseases and should be treated that way. In fact, more than two-thirds of spring allergy sufferers actually have year-round allergies.

But there's no reason for you to suffer. An allergist can work with you to find out what offending allergies trigger your symptoms and discuss treatments to put the spring back into your steps. The most effective way to treat spring allergies is through allergy shots, also called immunotherapy. These shots slowly introduce a little bit of what you are allergic to so your body learns to tolerate it, rather than react with the sneezing, a stuffy nose or itchy eyes.



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## Clean Indoor Air Assessments

We have a free program to assess indoor air pollutants or irritants in your home. Now when your symptoms are worse is a good time to see what steps you can take to reduce home respiratory irritants. The results of the assessment are completely confidential and many remedies are simple. Call 408 998-5865 to make an appointment.

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[www.lungsrus.org](http://www.lungsrus.org) (408)998-5865

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Avoiding the things that trigger your allergies can also help.

Here are some tips:

- Keep windows closed during pollen season, especially during the day.
- Stay inside during mid-day and afternoon hours when pollen counts are highest.
- Take a shower, wash hair and change clothing after working or playing outdoors.
- Wear a mask when doing outdoor chores like mowing the lawn. An allergist can help you find the type of mask that works best.

*Excerpted from: American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology*



## Do I Have Asthma or COPD or Both?

While having lunch, Susan noted that her friend Marsha took out an inhaler and used it. Susan was astonished to see that it was the same inhaler, same medication, that she used. Perplexed, she asked Marsha, "Do you have COPD?"

Marsha looked surprised and replied, "No, I have asthma — why do you ask?"

The confusion between these two conditions is not uncommon, as some of the same medications are used to treat them and some of the symptoms seem similar. But they are two different diseases.

There are several ways to distinguish asthma from COPD. While not an exact science, the following chart may help you see where your breathing difficulties fit best —

Associated with COPD	Associated with Asthma
Usually over age 40	Usually under age 40
Smoker	Non-smoker
Symptoms with exercise/exertion	Symptoms any-time (often at night)
Limited allergic history	Allergic history prominent
Mild bronchodilator response	Strong bronchodilator response
Change in FEV1 <15%	Change in FEV1 >25%

Table adapted from Petty TL and Seebass JS. Pulmonary Disorders of the Elderly 2007: p. 91.

The differences in these diseases stem in part from the fact that the causes are not the same. Asthma symptoms are generally caused by inflammation (swelling and irritation) of the airways. COPD, which includes emphysema, is caused more by damage to the airways and the small air sacs that are important for gas exchange in the body.

As noted in the table, asthma and allergies are closely related. The most common symptoms are coughing, wheezing, and shortness of

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breath. But while individuals with COPD are less likely to have allergies, they also experience coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath. The challenge for physicians arises when a patient has both asthma and COPD.

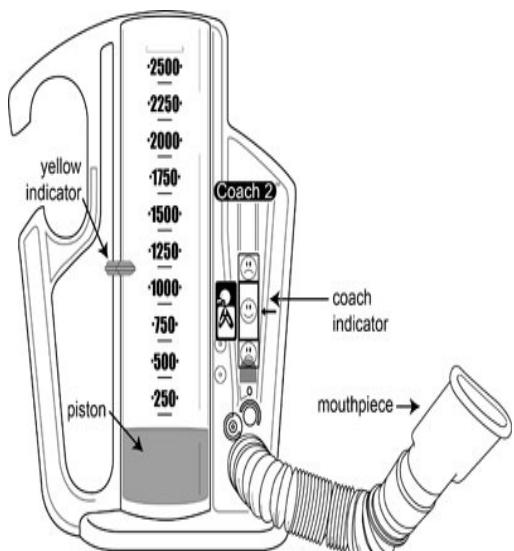
Because some of the medications used for asthma are very different from those used to treat COPD, it is important to have a correct diagnosis. According to doctors and respiratory therapists, a breathing test called spirometry should be used to determine which disease you have.

Spirometry involves breathing out hard and fast into a machine for 3-5 seconds. The machine records how much air you exhale in one second and this is called your "FEV1". After the breathing test you will be given a medicine called a bronchodilator to inhale. Bronchodilators relax the airways. After about 15 minutes you will be asked to repeat the breathing test. If your FEV1 improves by a certain pre-determined amount, you have asthma. If it does not, asthma is unlikely.

Even if you have been diagnosed with COPD, it is still a good idea to have this test performed, as many people do have both diseases!

Since a correct diagnosis is so important, speak with your physician if you are unsure what is causing your symptoms of coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath. Ask if he or she will order a spirometry test. Knowing what is causing your disease is the best way to treat — and perhaps prevent — those troublesome symptoms.

*Excerpted from : Your lung health.org*



## March Meetings

The next BBC meeting date and time for Avenidas, 450 Bryant Street, Palo Alto is Wednesday, March 16, 2016 from 10:30 am to 11:30 am.

The next meeting for San Jose group will be held at 1469 Park Ave on March 28, 2016 from 1:30 pm to 2:30 pm. The next Morgan Hill BBC meeting at Centennial Recreation Senior Center 171 W.Edmunson Ave. on May 11, 2016 from 10:30 am to 11:30 am.

## Promote the BBC

Help us spread the word about Better Breather Club meetings to your family, friends, neighbors, medical providers or community members. The strength of support group of its members sharing their coping skills and knowledge with others, especially those newly diagnosed. Call Janet (408) 998-5865 to answer any questions. We appreciate your time and effort.



[www.angrysquirrelstudio.com](http://www.angrysquirrelstudio.com)

# **Upcoming Better Breathers Club Meetings**

## **Palo Alto - 3rd Wednesday of each month**

Avenidas Senior Center, 450 Bryant Street, Palo Alto, 94301

**Wednesday, March 16, 2016**

10:30 am to 11:30 am

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## **Morgan Hill - 2nd Wednesday every other month**

Centennial Recreation Senior Center 171 W. Edmunson Ave. Morgan Hill, 95037

**Wednesday, May 11, 2016**

10:30 am to 11:30 am

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Breathe California of the Bay Area

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San Jose, CA 95126

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# **Better Breathing Newsletter**

## **San Jose - Last Monday of every month**

Breathe California office, 1469 Park Avenue, San Jose 95126

**Monday, March 28, 2016**

1:30 pm to 2:30 pm

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## **A Look Ahead: Upcoming BBC Meetings**

San Jose – Monday, April 25, 2016

Palo Alto – Wednesday, April 20, 2016

Morgan Hill - Wednesday, May 11, 2016