

How to Avoid Common Holiday Allergies

The holiday season is here and allergy and asthma sufferers should be extra careful as they decorate the house, prepare for feasts, or make plans for travel.

- Before decorating a live Christmas tree, allow it to dry out on an enclosed porch or garage. If you are allergic to mold you can also spray with a fungicide (be aware of a chemical odor).
- Clean artificial Christmas trees outside before decorating, as they can gather mold and dust while in storage. Do not buy an artificial tree coated with sprayed-on "snow." Such additions (including pine-scented sprays or oils) can aggravate asthma or allergy.
- Wash fabric decorations in hot, soapy water before displaying.
- Use plastic, metal, or glass decorations that cannot trap dust mites.
- When attending holiday parties, inform the host about your food allergy and ask about ingredients used to prepare the meal.
- Remind family and friends that strict avoidance is the only way to manage food allergies and that even "one little bit" can be harmful.
- When visiting family or friends, be prepared for possible reactions to everything, from pets to food to perfumes. Never leave home without the appropriate medication(s), equipment, and a written action plan so that proper steps can be taken in case of an emergency.
- If visiting homes that have pets, pre-medicate to minimize a possible reaction.
- Ask your relatives or friends to avoid burning wood in the fireplace. The smoke can irritate allergic and asthmatic airways.
- Candles, especially scented ones, can release toxic soot and petrochemicals that can aggravate the respiratory tract.
- The holidays can be a stressful time, especially for women. Pay attention to your stress level which can sometimes exacerbate allergic symptoms or lead to an asthma attack.

Surviving and enjoying the holidays is easier when you plan ahead and take precautionary steps.

Happy Holidays!