Breathe Easy. No Dust.

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Three things became evident to me less than a week after accepting a job in a big city several years ago: First, I walked too slowly; two, I should have held out for more money; and three, my childhood asthma had returned.

Remediating the first was an easy enough challenge, if not figure-slimming. For the second, I found a two-word solution at a local Costco: Ramen noodles. But as for the third, even a super-charged inhaler prescription left me wheezing myself to sleep each night (with a mild heart arrhythmia, to boot).

It wasn't until a month into my new digs when I was cleaning my apartment for the first time (did I mention I was a single male in his 30s?) that I noticed the respiratory culprit: dust.

A thorough cleaning provided nearly immediate relief, though less than a week later, the dust—and my breathing difficulties–had returned.

Since then, regular cleaning has provided me sustained relief, though in my case, it was vigilance borne out of necessity.

While big city living no doubt intensified dust's effects on my health, if left unchecked, no matter your respiratory sensitivities, dust poses real and material health risks.

But don't take just my word for it. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in a publication addressing indoor air quality, notes (link: http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/insidest.html), "The air within homes and other buildings can be more seriously polluted than the outdoor air in even the largest and most industrialized cities. Other research indicates that people spend approximately 90 percent of their time indoors. Thus, for many people, the risks to health may be greater due to exposure to air pollution indoors than outdoors."

Fortunately there are a number of simple, preventative steps that you can take to ensure that dust and other air pollutants do not cloud your health. Here are a few:

(1) Guarded Entry: Floor mats are the first line of dust defense when entering a workplace or living area. U-Need-It.com's mats (link: http://www.u-need-it.com/c-94-solutions-plus-floor-mats.aspx) offer dirt and dust filters that trap dirt, dust, and debris, diminishing the risk of carrying them indoors (at least beyond the mat). And with their 100% nitrile rubber backing, they offer superior slip- and skid-resistance and have been certified "High-Traction" by the National Floor Safety Institute.

(2) Vacuum Variety: Cleaning, of course, is the number one way to attack dust. But as dust becomes airborne easily, exercise caution when cleaning. Traditional vacuum cleaners can force dust airborne. Consider a water-trap vacuum that prevents dust from discharging into the air.

(3) Mop, Don't Mope: Sweep floors regularly with dust mops, whose materials are specially designed to gather dust. But don't take the dry mop shortcut every time. Clean floors (walls, and furniture, too) regularly with water and appropriate cleaning solutions, they're the preferred method for trapping and removing dust. U-Need-It.com carries a comprehensive selection of mops (link: http://www.u-need-it.com/c-210-mops.aspx) and cleaning solutions (link: http://www.u-need-it.com/c-10-soaps.aspx) for every indoor space.

(4) Pure air: Air purifiers provide additional protection against dust as well as other airborne contaminants. They're available in stand-alone, portable units or commercial devices that affix to HVAC units. NOTE: Ionic air purifiers have come under scrutiny as they generate ozone, which can produce adverse health effects. To learn more, read this U.S. EPA report. (link: http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/ozonegen.html).

Ventilate: Ensure your ventilation system is functioning properly without obstructing airflow. Make sure that there are exhaust fans in kitchens and bathrooms, and always vent gas-burning stoves, dryers, and water heaters outdoors. Additionally, operating an air conditioner with the vent control increases the ventilation rate with the outdoors, which can send dirty air outdoors, and bring clean air inside. For more information, see this American Lung Association guide for cleaning indoor air. (link: http://www.lungusa.org/healthy-air/work/healthy-air-at-work/cleaning-up-indoor-air.html).

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