

Air Quality and You

The AQI (Air Quality Index) is the EPA's index for reporting air quality. There are 6 categories ranging from Green (Good) to Maroon (Hazardous). The higher the AQI level, the more pollution there is present in the air and the more dangerous it can be to breathe in.

For information about the air quality for five major pollutants in your area, visit airnow.gov.

Wildfire Smoke and Ash:

Smoke and ash both pose health concerns, but they are particularly dangerous for children and those with respiratory conditions.

Smoke is a byproduct of combustion and is made up of very fine particulate matter and gases suspended in air. When inhaled at higher concentrations, it can be hazardous to your health.

Ash is generally made up of larger particles than smoke, though smaller ones can also be present. Whereas smoke is suspended in air, ash settles. Ash can get deeply into the lungs and cause respiratory irritation when inhaled, or skin irritation/burns if it contacts the skin. Care must be taken when cleaning up ash; wearing a NIOSH tested and approved N95/P100 respirator can help protect you from inhaling ash and refrain from dry sweeping and dusting which can kick up ash to be inhaled.

Note: Air quality may be bad even if you do not see or smell smoke or ash!

Indoor Air Quality:

In periods of poor air quality, keep windows and doors to the outside closed as much as possible to reduce the amount of outside air pollution that gets inside. Put your air conditioner on recirculation mode.

Central and portable air filters can be used and the filter should be regularly changed, though the frequency will depend on several conditions including the size of your home and the type of filter used. You should not exceed the manufacturer time limit, but you may have to replace them more frequently if you have pets, high exposure to smoke and other air pollutants, or residents with respiratory conditions.

Exercising Outdoors: Exercising outdoors can have many benefits, but you should refrain when the air quality enters into a dangerous range for you. Keep in mind that exercising increases the speed and depth of respiration. Pay attention to your body; if you feel faint or unwell, stop immediately and go indoors. Avoid running, even indoors, on bad air quality days; opt for low impact indoor exercises instead.

