



# Seniors & Wildfire Smoke

When the smoke rolls into our valley it affects all of us. With a changing climate, wildfire season is longer and fires are occurring at a higher frequency and intensity. While we don't have control over smoke, there are things we can do to stay healthy.

## How to know when the air is unhealthy?

### 3 ways to find out:

#### LOOK outside

The basic visibility rules are:

- o Cannot see 5 miles?  
*Unhealthy*
- o Cannot see 2 miles?  
*Very Unhealthy*
- o Cannot see 1 mile?  
*Hazardous*

#### CHECK Today's Air

Go to: [todaysair.mt.gov](http://todaysair.mt.gov)

#### CALL The Missoula area Air Quality Hotline 406-258-3600

### What's the problem?

Wildfire smoke contains small particulate matter called PM2.5. These microscopic particles can easily get into our lungs or even enter our bloodstream. This is unhealthy for seniors (and youngsters alike!) and can trigger respiratory problems in particular. It's important to understand just *how* unhealthy the air is on any smoky day. And conditions can change hour to hour.

### Who is at risk?

Smoky conditions are particularly challenging for seniors. As we age, lung capacity can decrease, increasing the likelihood that air pollution will stress our respiratory and circulatory systems. Anyone with a preexisting lung or heart condition may be at risk.

### What do people experience?

Coughing, trouble breathing, stinging eyes, running nose, scratchy throat, headaches, fast heartbeat, exhaustion, and grumpiness. For older adults, particulate air pollution may compromise your immune system, which increases susceptibility to bacterial or viral infections. Luckily, there are things we can do (see over).



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## Stay Healthy in Smoke

### What should Seniors do?

- Limit time and activity level outside - consider quieter indoor activities when air is unhealthy.
- Head indoors and tighten up your residence. Keep windows and doors closed if not too hot.
- Purchase one or more HEPA Portable Air Cleaners. These can be purchased locally or online (\$100-\$250) and are especially good for a room where an at-risk individual sleeps. Be sure they filter particles < 1 micron in size (avoid "HEPA-like" filters that don't). Our website has more information + recommendations.
- If you have A/C, turn on recirculate and clean your filters.
- If you have access, upgrade your HVAC filter to the best one your system can handle (see our website).
- Check the current and forecasted air quality reports, so that you can get outside and exercise when the air is healthy! Go to [montanawildfiresmoke.org](http://montanawildfiresmoke.org) for air quality resources.
- Get in touch with your health care provider if you are not feeling well or need to review your medications.

### What should we *not* do?

- Be super active outdoors. With unhealthy or hazardous air, it is not the time to walk, swim, or do outside yoga!
- Rely on a bandana or single string dust mask. N95 2-string masks can help, but they are difficult to fit and make breathing harder.
- Add more particulate matter to your home by burning anything (candles, cigarettes, incense), via vacuuming or even some cooking.
- Be in despair! The smoke will clear and the skies will be blue and bright again soon.

**AND DO** share this information and check in on friends and neighbors who may be particularly vulnerable.



CLIMATE SMART  
MISSOULA

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