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# From nose filters to charcoal bags, bad air is good business

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An air quality index between 0 and 50 is considered good. A day after Diwali the AQI in Delhi stood at 390, which means very polluted air. But Lavanshi Jain, an asthma patient residing in Rohini in north Delhi, was not too worried. Every day she steps out of her house wearing a pair of thin mesh-like nostril filters. "It has helped me breathe better, and my asthma attacks have reduced," believes Jain.

Jain is using a product called Nasofilters, developed by Nanoclean Global, a startup based in Delhi, in collaboration with researchers from IIT-Delhi. These filters are made with a special cellulose-based fibre and claim to trap microscopic pollutants like PM 2.5 and 10. "It's use-and-throw. Each pair costs Rs 10 and can be worn for 10-12 hours daily," says Jatin Kewlani,

COO, Nanoclean Global.

Rising air pollution levels have spawned a mini industry of anti-pollution products that go beyond air purifiers and face masks. From small bags of activated charcoal that clean up indoor air to bigger outdoor devices, the catalogue of anti-pollution merchandise is growing. Bengaluru-based startup Devic Earth has developed a device, Pure Skies, which uses radio waves to scatter pollutants like PM 2.5 and 10, nitrogen oxide and sulphur dioxide.

Just like a billiards player clears up the table by hitting the cue ball that further hits other balls, this device emits waves that scatter these pollutants and clean up the air over an area," explains Dr Srikanth Sola, chief executive officer and founder, Devic Earth.

The Delhi government used this device to control air quality during the Delhi Half Marathon in October. It is available in two variants, one for indoors and the other for outdoors. The device claims to improve the air quality index in the community in which it is placed, typically, by 33%.

Even international and domestic beauty brands (Clinique, L'Oreal, Shiseido, Kama Ayurveda, etc) have added 'pollution-fighting' ingredients to market their products. According to marketing and research firm Mintel, the Asia-Pacific region (which includes India) recorded a 40% rise in the number of beauty and personalcare products claiming to be anti-polluting between 2011 and 2013.

Startups are also targeting indoor pollution. BreatheFresh in Delhi has sold 30,000 units of its air-purifying bags in the past one and a half years. Called Vayu Natural, the bag is the size of a desk calendar and contains activated charcoal that absorbs indoor pollutants and allergens. The bag can last up to six months and then be recharged by letting it sit in the sun for an hour.

Bonphul Air Products in Gurugram has expanded its range of purifiers to include oxygen optimisers. "ACs and poor ventilation leave indoor air deficient in oxygen, which can lead to health issues like fatigue and breathing problems. Our product optimises oxygen to the desired 21% level," says Saloni Lohia, a sales consultant. While the smog is there for everyone to see and breathe, rushing in to buy each and every 'anti-pollution' product may not be a good idea.

"Technology can be useful but it cannot stand alone," reasons Anumita Roychowdhury, a senior expert on air pollution at the Centre for Science and Environment. In an article in Down to Earth, Roychowdhury writes: "More than the technology prowess, it is important to follow the basic principles of public health protection which demand control of pollution sources and reduction of direct exposure for millions..."

Till that happens, you can always take a whiff of fresh air from a can and feel better.