

Is there a link between Allergies and Asthma?

Studies suggest there might be a link in treatment options. For a person to have an allergy, the body's immune system is over reacting to an allergen and is producing IgE antibodies. You may experience a runny nose, rash, coughing or itching. An allergen can be many things; i.e. foods, fabrics, medications, insects, molds, plants, pollen, cats, dogs, dust mites, just to name a few. Let's look at four main allergies people seem to experience most; food, drug, insects, and hay fever. In each case if the allergy is severe enough allergy shots may help desensitize the effects of the allergy.

If a person is exposed to a food that produces symptoms of: tingling mouth, stomachache, stuffy nose, wheezing, or itchy skin they are probably allergic to that particular food to some degree. If they have trouble breathing or hives they need medical attention immediately, call 911. Statistics show that 7 out of 10 kids have allergies, but often out grow them. As adults, 3 out of 4 have some form of food allergies and it is important they learn to read food labels carefully. If your child has a specific food allergy, know what it is and be sure to inform the teacher along with anyone watching your child. Some foods that are common food allergens include: eggs, milk, nuts, fish, soy, wheat, or chocolate. To see if you have food allergies, you must see a physician and have a thorough history and physical and if symptoms are severe enough it may be recommended you have a skin test, and then possibly start immunotherapy. If you have a severe food allergy it is important that you wear a medical alert bracelet.

A medication allergy most often experienced is to penicillin's or sulfonamides although there are others. The human immune system over reacts to antigens encountered to certain medications taken. An individual may experience, hives, wheezing, blisters, fever, itching, or even anaphylaxis which would require medical help immediately. Know which medications you are allergic to and avoid them if at all possible. It is important to note that those with asthma might have allergy type reactions to aspirin or ibuprofen. Be sure to have your medication allergies noted in your personnel information you carry.

When talking about insect allergies. Ask any child and they will tell you they are allergic to them. But it is normal for everyone to get redness, itching and some swelling with any insect sting. These stings can be treated with cold packs, antihistamines or pain relievers if needed. But it is important to note that if you are allergic, then with each additional sting symptoms could become worse. Reactions can go from mild to severe. It becomes a medical emergency when there are hives, swelling of the tongue or throat. These individuals usually will have been given epinephrine to administer to themselves. If these individuals don't receive epinephrine they could go into anaphylaxis, coma, or death. If a person is extremely allergic to insect stings then it might help by seeing your Doctor and inquiring about starting allergy shots, so to become desensitized.

A common allergic rhinitis is known as hay fever. This is your immune system that over reacts to the particles in the air. It might only happen at certain times of the year or all the time depending on the antigen. Causes might be trees, grass, weeds, or pollen. Your body responds by a runny nose

eyes, ears or sneezing and itching will be present. You might find relief from: steroids, decongestants, antihistamines, eye drops or skin creams. Consult your Doctor before using these medications because too much decongestant can lead to nasal rebound and using an antihistamine can raise your blood pressure. If your allergies are severe enough your Doctor might prescribe skin testing so the culprit can be diluted and used in allergy shots so to desensitize you.

Asthma on the other hand is a chronic inflammatory disease of the airways that cause wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightness along with coughing. The bronchial tubes in the lungs narrow, making the air passage very difficult, they may become inflamed and swollen and the smooth muscles may tighten. In response the membrane that lines the bronchial tubes begin by producing a thick mucous that ends up blocking the airways, thus causing a restriction in breathing.

When looking at allergy induced asthma, research shows that 60% of people in the U.S. have it, which is approximately 20 million people. Research shows that greater than 4,000 individuals die each year from asthma. In allergy induced asthma the allergen triggers an inflammation within the lining of the lungs. (similar to allergy response) It should be noted that along with being familial, 78% of people with asthma will have hay fever. Treatments available include: use inhaled steroids, bronchodilators, immunotherapy (also known as allergy shots.) It should also be mentioned that there are other forms of asthma that needs attention. These include exercise induced asthma, non allergic asthma, cold air asthma or infections

that can induce asthma. These asthma's need to be addressed by your health care provider.

Studies have been done to improve allergies which in turn have been able to help with some asthma's. So a question for your Doctor would be – Might allergy shots help control my asthma? As always, if you have a question or comment, please eMail me at gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov