

## **ALLERGY/ HAY FEVER/ ALLERGIC RHINITIS**

### **What are allergies/ hay fever?**

Allergies are an allergic reaction of the nose (and sinuses) to pollen or another substance (pet dander, smoke, mold etc.) in the air.

Exposure to certain airborne substances cause chemicals to be released in the body (primarily histamines and leukotriene's) which in turn cause some of the symptoms below:

- a clear nasal discharge; sometimes sinuses or ear congestion
- an itchy nose with sneezing and sniffing
- itchy, watery eyes (eye allergies); cough

### **What is the cause?**

Although pollen is a common reason for allergies, it can also be caused by other allergens (allergy causing particles). Animal dander (especially cat hair or indoor pets which sleep in bed with children), smoke, dust mites, mold, etc. are all considered allergens and can cause allergic reactions. This allergic sensitivity is often inherited. Many children with allergy also have difficulties with inflammation in the lungs (asthma) or sensitive skin (eczema).

During late April and May the most common pollen causing allergy symptoms is from trees. From late May to mid-July, the pollen is usually from grass. From late August to the first frost, the leading cause of allergy symptoms is ragweed pollen.

### **How long does it last?**

This is a chronic condition that will probably recur every year during pollen season, perhaps for a lifetime. Therefore, it is important to learn how to control it. Some people suffer from allergy symptoms only during certain times of the year while others need year round control depending on the allergens causing symptoms.

### **How can I take care of my child?**

#### **• Oral antihistamine medicines**

One of the best drugs for allergy symptoms is an antihistamine. It will relieve nose and eye symptoms as well as itching. Examples of over-the-counter antihistamines are diphenhydramine (Benadryl- tends to make drowsy) and Claritin (Alavert; tends not to make drowsy). Prescription only antihistamines are numerous and may include Palgic, Brovex, Zyrtec, Clarinex, Allegra and others.

Symptoms clear up faster if antihistamines are given at the first sign of sneezing or sniffing. For children with daily symptoms, the best control is attained if antihistamines are taken continuously throughout the pollen season. For children with occasional symptoms, antihistamines can be taken on days when symptoms are present or expected. Antihistamines are also useful for itchy eyes, itchy nose, or itchy skin.

The main side effect of antihistamines is drowsiness. If your child becomes drowsy, switching to a combination product that contains an antihistamine with a decongestant (such as pseudoephedrine) temporarily can be helpful. If your child remains drowsy, continue the drug, but temporarily decrease the dosage. Your child should become tolerant of the regular dosage in 1 to 2 weeks.

Newer prescription antihistamines cause much less drowsiness

- **Leukotriene inhibitors**

Newer drugs are now in use which block a different chemical causing allergy, the leukotriene. The most common medication used in children is called Singulair. Leukotriene inhibitors can be used in addition to antihistamines (as well as other allergy medications) and have minimal side effects. Often medications such as Singulair work well for allergy symptoms that have a strong component of cough.

- **Prescription steroid nasal sprays for prevention**

If not helped by other therapies, symptoms (particularly nasal symptoms) can usually be controlled by steroid nasal sprays. Examples of nasal steroids include Rhinocort, Flonase, Nasonex, Nasacort, Nasarel, and others. Nasal steroids do not help with eye symptoms. Therefore they are frequently used along with oral antihistamines.

- **Eye allergies associated with allergy**

If your child also has itchy, watery eyes, wash his face and eyelids to remove pollen. Then apply a cold wet cloth to the eyelids for 10 minutes. An oral antihistamine will usually bring the eye symptoms under control. If not, discuss with your doctor other treatment options which may be available.

- **Prevention of allergy symptoms**

Avoid pollens, feather pillows, pets, farms, stables, tobacco smoke, and other irritants which seems to bring on symptoms of allergy.

- **Allergy shots**

Allergy shots are usually not necessary, however if you have questions regarding allergy shots or allergy testing, talk with your doctor.

- **Common mistakes**

Not avoiding offending allergens/ irritants. Not taking allergy medications correctly.

### **When should I call my health care provider?**

Call during office hours if:

- Your child's symptoms are not controlled in 2 days with antihistamines.
- Your child develops sinus pain or pressure.
- You have tried several medical therapies and are not experiencing relief.