

Allergy and Asthma Awareness

Many people are excited for the change of seasons so they can shed the fall and winter blues, but many dread the spring for one word "Allergy". Did you know that it is estimated that 50+ million people in the United States have allergies, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Allergies are among the countries most common, but overlooked, diseases.

An allergy is when your immune system reacts to a foreign substance, called an allergen. It could be something you eat, inhale into your lungs, inject into your body, or touch. An allergic reaction can cause coughing, sneezing, hives, rashes, itchy eyes, a runny nose, and a scratchy throat. In severe cases, it can cause low blood pressure, breathing trouble, asthma attacks, and even death if not treated promptly. There is no cure for allergies. You can manage allergies with prevention and treatment.

In order to determine whether you have an allergy:

- Consult with your health care provider who will ask you detailed questions about your signs or symptoms.
- Perform a physical exam and also recommend either a skin test or blood test.
 - Skin test is a painful test that will prick small amounts of the proteins found in common allergies into your body. If you are allergic, you will develop a raised bump (hive) at the test location on your skin.
 - Blood test is specific IgE (SIge) blood testing, commonly called ImmunoCAP testing, or radioallergosorbent test (RAST), measures the amount of allergy-causing antibodies in your bloodstream, known as immunoglobulin E (IgE) antibodies. Once the blood sample is sent to the medical laboratory, the results of the test will assist your providers with an appropriate plan of action for you regarding treatment.

Once you have identified your allergy, the next step is to come up with an action plan.

Allergy treatments include:

- Allergen avoidance-your provider will assist you with steps to identify and avoid your allergy triggers. This is an important step in preventing allergic reactions and reducing symptoms.
- Medications-dependending upon your allergy, can help reduce your immune system reaction and ease symptoms. Your provider might suggest nonprescription or prescription medications (e.g., pills or liquid, nasal sprays or eye drops).
- Immunotherapy-for severe allergies or allergies not completely relieved by other treatments, your provider might recommend allergen immunotherapy. Immunotherapy treatment involves series of injections or purified allergen extracts, usually given over a period of a few years.

- Emergency Epinephrine (EpiPen) - if you have a severe allergy, you might need to carry an emergency epinephrine shot at all times. Given the severity of the allergic reaction, the epinephrine shot (Auvi-Q, EpiPen, others) can reduce symptoms until you get emergency treatment.

Prevention of allergic reactions depends upon the type of allergy you have. General measures to follow:

- Avoid known triggers-Although you are treating your allergy symptoms, try to avoid triggers. For example, if you're allergic to pollen, stay inside with windows and doors closed when pollen is high. If you're allergic to dust mites, dust and vacuum and wash bedding often.
- Keep a diary-Track your activities and what you eat, when your symptoms seem to occur and what seems to help.
- Wear a medical alert bracelet- If you have a severe allergic reaction, a medical alert bracelet (or necklace) informs others that you have a serious allergy in case you have a reaction and you are unable to communicate.

Did you know that more than 25 million people in the U.S. have asthma, according to the Allergy and Asthma Foundation of America? When you are diagnosed with asthma, it can greatly impact your daily life.

Asthma is a long-term disease that causes your airways to become swollen and inflamed, making it hard to breathe. There is no cure for asthma, but it can be managed and controlled.

In order to determine if you have asthma:

- Taking a detailed medical history
- A physical exam
- Lung function tests
- Chest or sinus X-ray
- Blood tests to look for certain markers
- Allergy tests

The doctor will look at the results from these tests. They will then decide what type of asthma you have. They will develop a treatment plan based on the type and severity of your symptoms. An asthma action plan is created as you consult with your provider with the goal to prevent and control your asthma attacks.

The best way to manage asthma is to avoid triggers, take medications to prevent symptoms, and prepare to treat asthma episodes if they occur.

Common symptoms are coughing, shortness of breath, wheezing, and chest tightness (or pain). Asthma may lead to a medical emergency. It is important to know the signs of a severe asthma episode (or asthma attack).

Did you know that there is a connection between allergies and asthma? Allergies and asthma can both be caused by external disturbances such as pollen, dust, pet hair, and other airborne pollutants. However, while the causes might look similar, the symptoms usually look different. Standard allergies usually showcase themselves through sneezing, itching, sinus problems, coughing and watery eyes. Most of the symptoms start in the head. Asthma begins in the lungs, so will cause difficulty breathing.

Many people live healthy lives with asthma if it's managed well. With a good treatment plan and guidance from your doctor, you can still do much of what you enjoy. For example, many professional athletes have asthma.