



Wellness News

May 2016

Asthma and Allergies

Breathe Well, Live Well

Staying healthy when you have asthma

Having certain lung infections early in your life can make you more likely to develop asthma. So can being around tobacco smoke and other allergy triggers (allergens) at a young age.¹ Your family history also plays a part. If one or both of your parents have asthma, you are likely to have it, too.

Managing asthma

Asthma causes the airways in the lungs to swell up. This can make it hard to breathe. It can also cause coughing, wheezing and chest tightness.

When asthma “flares up,” it’s called an asthma attack. These attacks can be mild or severe. In some cases they can be deadly.¹

You can take steps to make living with asthma easier. You and your doctor will make a plan to keep your asthma under control. You’ll have a plan for normal days and an emergency plan for when you have asthma attacks. Your doctor can help you find out what triggers your attacks and decide what kind of medication you need. If you have asthma attacks more often or they’re getting worse, see your doctor to change your treatment plan.

What happens during an asthma attack?

If you have asthma, your airways are always a bit swollen. That makes you react to triggers more than other people do. Asthma triggers irritate the airways — like cold air, stress and things you’re allergic to.²

When you’re exposed to a trigger:

- Your airways may swell up more than normal.
- Your airways may make more mucus than normal.
- Your muscles around the airways may tighten.

All of these changes keep you from getting enough air into your lungs — and getting enough oxygen in your blood. This can prevent vital organs from working, which can cause death. If you have asthma, your doctor may talk to you about:

- A quick-relief drug or long-term control drug that may be right for you.
- A peak flow meter, a small tool that measures how quickly and forcefully you can breathe out after taking a deep breath. It can give you an early warning that an asthma attack is about to happen.

Also, you and your doctor will work together to create an action plan. The plan has two parts. Part one is a plan for normal days. Part two is an emergency plan for when you have attacks. Once you have a plan, pay close attention to your asthma to make sure it does not get worse.

*Your plan may or may not cover peak flow meters. For details about what your plan does and does not cover, check your Certificate of Coverage or call the Customer Service phone number on your ID card.

Sources: 1 Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America website: Asthma Facts and Figures (accessed March 2015): aafa.org. 2 National Heart Lung and Blood Institute website: Health Topics: Asthma (accessed March 2015): www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/asthma

This issue

Breathe Well, Live Well

Take Control of Your Allergies

When Kids Have Allergies

National Women’s Health Week

Take Control of Your Allergies. Understand and Manage Your Symptoms.

Watery eyes, itchiness, runny nose. Sound familiar? If it does, you might have allergies.

An allergic reaction is when your immune system has a bad response to something. Normally your immune system protects your body from getting sick because of things like bacteria and viruses. It also helps protect you against allergens, the things that set off an allergic reaction.^{1,2} When it doesn’t do that job, it’s like having a very sensitive alarm system — it alerts your body to things that really shouldn’t cause a reaction.

What causes allergies?

A lot of people have allergies. Your genes and the environment can play a role in that. If both of your parents have allergies, you’ll probably have allergies. But you may not be allergic to the same things or have the same reactions. Common allergy triggers are:^{1,2}

- Pollen, mold, pet dander, dust, food, medicines, insect bites, jewelry, makeup and spices

Allergy symptoms can be different from one person to the next. But here are some common signs:^{1,2}

- Breathing problems or wheezing
- Burning, tearing, itchy, red or swollen eyes
- Coughing
- Diarrhea, stomach cramps or throwing up
- Headache
- Hives or skin rash
- Itchy nose, mouth, throat, skin or other part of the body
- Runny nose

What can you do?

If you think you have an allergy, tell your doctor. Here are some ways to test for an allergy:^{1,2}

- Skin test
- Blood test or complete blood count
- Use or elimination tests: using certain things to see if you get worse or avoiding certain things to see if you get better

The best way to reduce your symptoms is to try to avoid the things that cause your allergies.^{1,2} Sometimes, that’s not so easy to do. It might be easy to stay away from certain foods or medicines. But if your allergy trigger comes from the air around you, it can be hard to avoid.

Allergies can’t be cured, but there are ways to treat and relieve your symptoms. Treatment will depend on the kind of allergy you have and how bad it is. Medicines or allergy shots may help.

But you may need to get shots for years before they work. And they don’t always work for everyone.¹

Severe allergic reactions, called anaphylaxis, need to be treated with a medicine called epinephrine. It can save a person’s life if it’s taken immediately after a severe allergic reaction.^{1,2}

Continued ...

When Kids Have Allergies

Asthma attacks can make it hard for kids to do normal things. They might have trouble sleeping, keeping up at school or even playing. A bad asthma attack can send a child to the hospital.¹

What happens during an asthma attack?

During an asthma attack, the airways and lungs become irritated, and they swell.¹ Muscles around the airways tighten. As the airways tighten and swell, less air gets through to the lungs. Asthma attacks can make people cough, wheeze and have trouble breathing.²

Asthma attacks happen when the body over-reacts to certain things. These things are called “triggers.” Some common triggers include:^{1,3}

- Having a cold or other infection.
- Breathing tobacco smoke or polluted air.
- Being around things like dust mites, pet dander, mold or pollen (these are called allergens).
- Weather changes.
- Breathing cold, dry air.
- Physical activity, including normal play.
- Getting very excited, mad, scared or upset.

Tips to help your kids stay active – and control their asthma⁴

- Take it easy. Start exercising slowly and finish with a cool-down.
- Stay away from things that trigger asthma.
- Take breaks. They can catch their breath, and remind them to drink lots of water.
- Mix it up. Try different activities, like skating or a long walk in the park.
- Check air quality first. Go online or watch the weather report on TV. Exercise outside only when the air is clean.

What causes asthma?

Children with asthma have sensitive immune systems. A sensitive immune system can be a family trait. Other things that make a child more likely to have asthma include:¹

- Having allergies or a family history of allergies.
- Living in an area with a lot of air pollution.
- Having a runny or stuffy nose all the time.
- Low birth weight (under 5.5 lbs.)
- Being overweight.
- Having heartburn or reflux.
- Having certain lung infections.

Kids with asthma can have healthy, normal lives if they stick to an asthma management plan.³ Your child’s pediatrician will help you make an asthma management plan. Usually a plan includes two kinds of medicine. One is a daily medicine to help control symptoms. The other is a rescue medicine in an inhaler, for stopping an asthma attack once it starts.¹

Sources: 1 Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, Childhood Asthma (September 21, 2010): mayoclinic.com. 2 Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, Asthma Attack (January 6, 2011): mayoclinic.com. 3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Asthma Control Program, Asthma Fast Facts for Kids (accessed March 16, 2011): cdc.gov. 4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Asthma: Kids (July 12, 2012): cdc.gov/asthma/children.html.

Allergies in Kids (continued)

Some research has shown that breastfeeding babies until they’re at least four months old may help prevent an allergy to cow’s milk.¹

Changes in the mother’s diet while she’s pregnant or breastfeeding don’t seem to make a difference in preventing allergies in kids. But the timing of when your kids start eating solid foods and when they first try certain foods can help prevent some allergies.¹

Some kids may outgrow allergies when they get older, especially food allergies.¹

Sources: 1 PubMed Health: Allergies (accessed January 2015): ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001815. 2 Mayo Clinic: Allergies (accessed January 2015): mayoclinic.com. 3 Mayo Clinic: Allergy-proof your home (accessed January 2015): mayoclinic.com. 4 Mayo Clinic: Food allergy (accessed January 2015): mayoclinic.com. 5 Mayo Clinic: Drug allergy (accessed January 2015): mayoclinic.com.

National Women’s Health Week



The 17th annual National Women’s Health Week kicks off on Mother’s Day, May 8, and is celebrated until May 14, 2016. The goal is to empower women to make their health a priority. The week also serves as a time to help women understand what steps they can take to improve their health.

What is National Women’s Health Week?

National Women’s Health Week is an observance led by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women’s Health. The goal is to empower women to make their health a priority. The week also serves as a time to help women understand what steps they can take to improve their health. The 17th annual National Women’s Health Week kicks off on Mother’s Day, May 8, and is celebrated until May 14, 2016.

What steps can I take for better health?

To improve your physical and mental health, you can:

- Visit a doctor or nurse to receive regular checkups and preventive screenings.
- Get active and eat healthy.
- Pay attention to mental health, including getting enough sleep and managing stress.
- Avoid unhealthy behaviors, such as smoking, texting while driving, and not wearing a seatbelt or bicycle helmet.

How can I participate in National Women’s Health Week?

The Office on Women’s Health invites women across the country to:

- Spread the word through social media. Use the #NWHW hashtag.
- Organize events or activities.
- Use the promotional tools and resources that will be available this spring.

Source: <http://www.womenshealth.gov/index.php>

Recipe of the month

Couscous Shrimp Toss

Ingredients:

- 1 cup couscous, uncooked
- 12 ozs. medium uncooked shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 1 to 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tbsps. fresh parsley, chopped
- 2 tbsps. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsps. fresh lemon juice
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Directions:

Cook couscous according to package directions. Meanwhile, coat skillet with cooking spray, and heat pan over medium heat. Add shrimp and garlic; cook, stirring, 3 to 4 minutes or just until shrimp turns pink and is cooked through. Fluff couscous with a fork; transfer to a serving bowl. Add shrimp mixture and parsley; drizzle with oil and lemon juice. Toss to mix; season with salt and pepper.

Makes 4 (1 1/2 cup) servings. Per serving (without salt and pepper): 320 calories.

Recipe provided by BSBSGa Healthy Options mobile app.

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Beware fitness myths!

Have you heard that you should stop exercising as you get older? Or that women shouldn’t do weight-training activities because they’ll get too muscular? These are both common fitness myths.

The truth is that staying active is one of the best ways you can stay strong and fight aging. Plus, you can lower your risk for many serious health problems, like heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, some cancers and bone density loss. Women, who are more prone to osteoporosis, can especially benefit from weight-training activities that keep their bones, muscles and joints in good shape.

So the next time you hear people making excuses for why physical activity is bad for you, tell them to get the facts!

Healthy Hint #37