

The Wellness Family

Dr. Gerken Keeps You Informed

Allergies and Your Family

For the family that suffers from seasonal allergies, springtime doesn't always bring flowers and sunshine. Sometimes it just means more dust and pollen, which means more congestion. Of course it doesn't have to be that way; while all the latest medical research says that allergies are incurable and only manageable, that's not necessarily the case.

What are allergies?

The word "allergy" means an altered or abnormal tissue reaction after sensitive body tissues are brought into contact with an allergen. There are three general categories of allergens: contact, food or inhalant. Inhalant allergies – allergies experienced in response to material in the air – are the most common. The four biggest airborne allergens are pollen, pet dander, mold and house dust.

Thomas Platts-Mills, M.D. head of the University of Virginia Medical Center's Division on Allergy and Immunology says, "You find a bit of everything in house dust... but the single biggest cause of problems is the dust mite."

The dust mite is an almost-microscopic relative of ticks and spiders, but the living mite is not actually the problem. The actual allergen is the fecal matter they expel and the bodies of dead dust mites.

What are the symptoms?

The body, when exposed to an allergen, triggers the immune system to go into action. The immune system cells, known as "mast cells", release a substance called histamine that attaches to receptors in blood vessels causing them to enlarge. Histamine also binds to other receptors causing redness, swelling, itching and changes in secretion.

Allergy symptoms, vary greatly and typically include:

- Headaches or migraines
- Stuffy or runny nose
- Diarrhea or vomiting
- Shortness of breath or asthma-like symptoms
- Swelling of the face and eyes
- Itchy or watery eyes

These symptoms can be quite annoying but, with the exception of the asthmatic, are not life threatening.

What are the treatments?

Typically, a medical doctor is going to be focused on relieving the symptoms, not getting to the source of the symptoms, and so the usual recommended treatment is over-the-counter allergy medications.

For the child, a pediatrician will generally recommend diphenhydramine, an over-the-counter drug commonly known as Benadryl. Before following this advice consider that the side-effects commonly associated with this chemical include dryness of the mouth, nose and throat, drowsiness, disturbed coordination, upset stomach, dizziness, chest congestion and headaches.



"When exposed to allergens, the body triggers the immune system to go into action."

In some cases, these can even include:

- Heart palpitations or increased heart rate
- Blurred or double vision
- Hyperactivity or excitability (especially in children)
- Nervousness or anxiety

Parents should also be made aware, before giving this drug to their child, that this same chemical is used in most over-the-counter sleep aids, including Tylenol PM.

For the adolescent or adult, an MD will generally recommend the over-the-counter combined chemicals loratidine and pseudoephedrine, commonly known as Claritin-D. This drug is taken to provide temporary relief of runny nose, sneezing, nasal stuffiness and itchy or watery eyes associated with common inhalant allergies. However, the side-effects from these combined chemicals are caused by the over-stimulation of the nervous system leading to nervousness, restlessness, excitability, dizziness, headache, fear or anxiety, muscle tremors, convulsions and hallucinations.

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What are healthier options?

While treating the symptoms may seem the easiest, it's important to understand that the side-effects of these chemicals increase in severity with long-term usage and may even eventually worsen the symptoms. The best treatment for allergies is to eliminate the source of the allergens. This can be done with a few simple steps:

- Replace old pillows, rugs and blankets – these dust collectors can easily be removed from the home
- Wash, dry and pack stuffed animals in air-tight containers – while these dust magnets are more difficult to remove from the home because of the child's attachment, they can be stored in such a way as to limit their ability to collect dust and aggravate allergies
- Wash and dry bed linens at least twice a month including blankets and quilts
- Avoid white sugar – refined sugar has no nutritional value and actually overtaxes the body during digestion; instead substitute with honey
- Avoid dairy products – dairy increases the production of mucus and can mimic an allergic reaction
- Eat whole foods that are prepared at home. It's important to establish a regular eating schedule that includes healthier foods to build the immune system, which will actually help to alleviate allergic reactions

Are there healthier choices?

An important first step in treating allergies will be to eliminate the cause of the allergies; but this may not be easy to determine right away. Items that have been in your home for a long time can sometimes be overlooked in the search for the allergen culprit. In the meantime, there are always healthier choices than over-the-counter chemicals, including the following:

- Vitamin C – taken daily can block the histamine that causes the allergy symptoms

- Apple Cider Vinegar – this most popular home remedy should be taken as 2 tbsp Apple Cider Vinegar, mixed with 4 oz of water and 1 tbsp of natural honey up to three times a day
- Raw Honey – 2 tbsp of natural, *local* honey up to three times a day has been known to relieve allergy symptoms
- Bromelain – a pineapple extract decreases the inflammation associated with allergies
- Zinc – helps control inflammation in the respiratory tract and supports proper immune function

In Summary

One of the primary causes of allergies is an impaired immune system, which substantially increases the risk of allergic reactions. "This occurs when the immune system becomes stressed due to an overload of toxins," says C. Gableman, MD, a practitioner of environmental medicine.

Your doctor of Chiropractic is the only healthcare professional that recognizes the important role a healthy nervous system plays in a healthier immune system. Most, if not all, over-the-counter and prescription allergy treatments adversely affect the nervous system, which means that they will adversely affect your overall health and wellness.

Many parents report that their children's allergies improve with regular Chiropractic care; so before you reach for a chemical, reach for the phone and call Dr. Gerken for more information.

For more information please visit:

- www.naturalfamilyonline.com
- www.icpa4kids.org
- www.healthychild.com

Dear Parent,

Dr. Gerken is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. Take a moment today to discuss your family's allergies with your Family Wellness Chiropractor.

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