

Healthy Habits

May 2006

Tips for reaching and maintaining your optimum state of health

May is Allergy and Asthma Awareness Month

What exactly are they?

Allergies are diseases of the immune system that cause an overreaction to substances called "allergens." Allergies are grouped by the kind of trigger, time of year or where symptoms appear on the body. Examples are outdoor allergies (also called "hay fever," "seasonal," "perennial" or "nasal" allergies), food and drug allergies, latex allergies, insect allergies, skin allergies or eye allergies. With the proper treatment and lifestyle, people who have allergies can live healthy and active lives.

Asthma is a disease of the lungs in which the airways become blocked or narrowed causing breathing difficulty. This chronic disease affects nearly 20 million Americans. Asthma is commonly divided into two types: allergic (extrinsic) asthma and non-allergic (intrinsic) asthma. There is still much research that needs to be done to fully understand how to prevent, treat and cure asthma but with proper management, people with asthma can also live healthy and active lives.

How are they different?

While they may share some of the same symptoms and triggers, it is important, to learn the differences between allergies and asthma. An allergy is a response to a specific substance, such as hives from a bee sting or sneezing every time you pet a cat. Asthma is a chronic lung disease. Factors that may not trigger an allergic reaction, such as cold weather or exercise, can cause an asthma attack. If you suffer from either, knowing your triggers and how to avoid them can greatly increase the quality of your life.



Knowing the difference between allergies and asthma is a crucial component in obtaining effective care.

Get the right care and breathe easier!

If you want to regain control over your life and health, nothing is as important as talking to your healthcare provider. A trained physician can help you establish a diagnosis by performing a physical exam and evaluating your medical records, family history and related experience. For asthma sufferers, tests to determine your lung function and possible triggers will also play a large role. If you have severe allergies, expect skin, patch or blood tests to determine your allergens. Afterwards, armed with prudent advice on avoiding allergens or asthma triggers coupled with medication, if necessary, you will be prepared to get the most out of an active and healthy lifestyle.

Is there a cure?

Currently, there is no medical cure for asthma or allergies but many times minor changes to your lifestyle and environment can make a world of difference. Work with your doctor to establish a management plan to ensure that you remain in control of your condition--not the other way around.

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