

THE ALLERGY & ASTHMA CLINIC

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NEWSLETTER

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Recent New York Times Article Stresses Importance and Success of Allergy Treatment

You know the feeling; it starts with a telltale sniffle, itchy eyes and an occasional cough. You think you're getting a cold, but the cold never comes while the runny nose never seems to leave.

"That could be a sign of allergies," says Dr. Kevin Weiss, an expert on allergies and president of the American Board of Medical Specialties, as quoted in the NY Times on March 6. Not a surprising diagnosis when you consider that more than 40 percent of children (and 20 to 30 percent of adults) suffer from allergic rhinitis, often called allergies. With spring pollen season just getting started, we are bound to hear more of those telltale sniffles.

Allergies are no trivial matter. Each year, allergic rhinitis accounts for two million missed school days and \$2.3 million in health care costs for children younger than 12. It's not unusual for allergy sufferers to spend thousands of dollars each year on doctor visits, medications and other products, says Dr. Linda Cox, former committee chairwoman for the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology. What's more, Dr. Cox says, allergies left untreated in children can often lead to asthma, a chronic and debilitating pulmonary disease.

Combating allergies often requires a multi-pronged approach. If your child is extremely uncomfortable, losing sleep or missing a lot of school, and the current medications he or she uses aren't working, you may need to take the next step: an allergy evaluation. An allergist will most likely do a skin test to pinpoint exactly what your child is allergic to. This is often more precise than the blood tests and is usually covered by insurance.

Eliminate Allergens:

Keep your pet away from carpeted rooms, sleeping areas, upholstered furniture and other places where it becomes difficult or impossible to remove dander. Cats are the animals that cause the most allergy problems, and cat allergen can remain in a house for an average of 20 weeks after the cat is removed.

If dust mites are a problem, remove drapes, stuffed animals, pet bedding, upholstered

furniture and even carpeting from the bedroom. Wash linens frequently. Dust with a moist cloth or an electrostatic fabric duster. Both do a better job of actually collecting dust rather than just stirring it around. Remember: Dust takes a couple of hours to settle after cleaning and vacuuming. Tumble-drying stuffed animals on high heat for 20 minutes will also kill dust mites.

Get rid of any pest problems, like roaches or mice. Both can be huge allergy triggers. In addition, keep windows closed during peak allergy season, especially on windy days.

Make the Patient Less Allergic--Consider Immunotherapy:

Even after you've identified and tried to eliminate the source of your child's allergies, he or she may still be suffering. If that happens, you may consider allergy shots.

Many parents may wonder whether the allergy doctor is over-diagnosing allergies and then over-treating their children. Dr. Cox responds that allergists get to the root of the problem instead of just treating symptoms. By contrast, non-specialists typically prescribe medicines to treat symptoms without addressing the underlying condition.

A new study published last month in the prestigious *Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology* found that allergy shots, also known as immunotherapy, could actually help eliminate allergy symptoms after only 18 months. What's more, shots may help save you money in the long run. Among the children with allergic rhinitis studied, shots helped to reduce total health care costs by a third, and prescription drug costs by 16 percent, said Dr. Cox, who was a co-author of the study. With the cost of prescription medications getting higher and higher, many patients find that immunotherapy not only works better for them, but also saves them money as well. These savings are even more pronounced when you factor in the cost of lost work or school days and decreased productivity many allergy sufferers experience.

With immunotherapy, the patient receives a vaccination containing a small amount of the allergen. This prompts the body to make natural antibodies, which naturally increase one's immunity to the culprit. "It is the only therapy that doesn't just treat allergy symptoms but tries to get at the cause,"

Dr. Cox said. It's the closest thing we have to a cure for the misery and inconvenience of allergies.

In addition to treating the original allergy, patients successfully treated with immunotherapy are less likely to develop new allergies and less likely to develop many of the serious secondary complications such as asthma, sinusitis and ear infections, commonly associated with allergies.

Successfully Using Medicines:

Although the New York Times article did not cover it, Dr. Engler wishes to stress that medications also have their role in relieving the symptoms of allergy. Even though they do not cure the patient, when properly prescribed and utilized, allergy and asthma medications can do wonders in helping many patients feel better and more fully enjoy their lives. At this time of the year, when pollen counts are high, it is important that you have a clear cut game plan on how you are going to handle your allergies—both with regard to doing your best to prevent allergy symptoms from flaring up in the first place and in getting the relief you need if your symptoms break through and leave you feeling under the weather.

Fortunately, we have a number of treatment options available that are very effective at both preventing and relieving allergy and asthma symptoms, but in general, these treatments work best when used in advance.

If you are concerned that you or a loved one's allergies are not being properly treated, don't suffer in silence, please contact us so we can review your treatment options and help you feel your best. We will go over what treatment will most likely work best for you, discuss possible side effects and help you make the best possible decision for you and your family.

Change in Office Hours:

Due to necessary repairs to plumbing in the building, our office will be **closed:**
Saturday, April 24, 2010

Our office will be open during regular business hours on:
Friday, April 23, 2010
Monday, April 26, 2010

We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause.