

The Allergy & Asthma Clinic

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Summertime allergy tips

If red, white and blue equals hives, tissues and shortness of breath due to asthma, your Fourth of July celebration isn't headed in the right direction. Independence Day and other summer celebrations should be filled with barbecues, flags and fun, not allergy and asthma triggers.

"Summer is a time to be out enjoying warm weather and friends," says allergist Todd Mahr, president of the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI). "Unfortunately, some traditional elements of summer celebrations – think fireworks and barbecues – can set off alarms for allergy and asthma sufferers. But knowing how to avoid allergic triggers can mean a Fourth of July that's sure to make everyone happy – and healthy."



Here are four tips from the ACAAI to help make sure you're Fourth of July is filled with all the right kinds of summer fun, and no allergic flares.

1. Make it a smoke-free holiday – Anything that causes smoke is a problem for people with asthma, so allergists recommend keeping your distance from both fireworks and campfires. If you just love fireworks, wear a mask with a NIOSH N95 filter to help keep smoke out of your lungs. Keep your reliever inhaler with you in case of an asthma attack.

2. But that burger looks so good – You may have heard that it's possible to get a meat allergy from a tick bite. Sadly, it's true that a bite from the Lone Star Tick can cause you to be allergic to red meats. Very rarely, people with this allergy also react to cow's milk and gelatins found in some medications. Symptoms can range from hives, swelling, wheezing, nausea and vomiting – all the way to life-threatening anaphylaxis.

Sometimes anaphylaxis doesn't start until three to eight hours after eating the food you are allergic to. Once diagnosed, those with the allergy need to avoid red meat.

3. Watch your step! – Most insect stings in the United States come from wasps, yellow jackets, hornets and bees. It's estimated that potentially life-threatening allergic reactions to insect venom occur in less than 1 percent of children and 3 percent of adults. Avoiding insect stings is the first line of defense, so:

Wear shoes when walking in the grass where stinging insects look for food.

Cover soft drink cans as stinging insects are attracted to open cans.

Avoid wearing bright colored clothing and perfumes.

Keep food covered when eating outdoors.

If you experience a severe systemic reaction to an insect sting, use your epinephrine auto injector if you have one, and then call 911 to receive immediate emergency care. Follow up with an allergist.

4. Why are my lips tingling? – Summer celebrations mean a bounty of fresh produce, but if you suffer from hay fever, you may experience a scratchy throat, itchy mouth or swelling of your lips or mouth after eating some raw fruits or vegetables. Oral Allergy Syndrome (OAS) is caused when allergens found in both pollen and raw fruits and veggies cross react. Usually the symptoms do not progress beyond the mouth. Because the symptoms typically subside quickly once the fresh fruit or raw vegetable is swallowed or removed from the mouth, treatment is not usually necessary. Check with your allergist to see if your OAS symptoms might be a cross reaction to pollen.

If your allergy and asthma symptoms are keeping you from summer fun, make an appointment and get evaluated. You and your doctor can develop a treatment plan that can help you enjoy the great outdoors this summer!