

# THE ALLERGY & ASTHMA CLINIC

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NEWSLETTER

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## Preventing Allergies can help prevent the risk of depression! Really?

The unfortunate fact is spring time always brings a rash of sneezing and stuffy noses. But can seasonal allergies be psychologically harmful? According to a recent article in the New York Times, it can be.

A wave of emerging research suggests this can be the case. While there's no firm evidence that allergies cause depression, large studies show that allergy sufferers do seem to be at higher risk of depression.

Severe allergies can bring sleeplessness, headaches, fatigue and a general feeling of physical depletion, all of which can worsen mood. Studies have found that allergic reactions release compounds in the body called cytokines, which play a role in inflammation and may reduce levels of the hormone serotonin, which helps maintain feelings of well-being. And it's well known that some common allergy medications, including many decongestants and antihistamines, can cause anxiety and mood swings.

Several large studies have found that the risk of depression in people with severe allergies is about twice that of those without allergies. Researchers at the University of Maryland reported that this link may help explain a widely established – but poorly understood – increase in suicides during the spring every year. Analyzing medical records, the researchers found that in some patients, changes in allergy symptoms during low- and high- pollen seasons corresponded to changes in their depression and anxiety scores.

A Finnish population study found a link between allergies and depression; however, women were much more likely to be affected. A study of twins in Finland also showed a shared risk for depression and allergies, a result of genetic influences.

The bottom line is that severe allergies may be a risk factor for depression, which we would like to help prevent. We want to help you and your loved ones appreciate and look forward to spring time, not dread it. If you think allergies are dragging you down, please contact our office and let us know how you are feeling so we can help you enjoy a happy and healthy spring.

## Asthma and Obesity are major public concerns

Over the last few decades, the prevalence of both asthma and obesity has increased worldwide. In the United States the prevalence of overweight status has increased from 6.5% to approximately 19% in school-aged children and there is ample evidence of an association between obesity and asthma in children and adults.

Little is known about treatment responses in children with asthma who are overweight or obese. Because obesity is thought to promote inflammation, many experts believe that overweight/obese asthmatic children would have suboptimal responses to anti-inflammatory medications compared with those of non-overweight/non-obese asthmatic children. Studies have demonstrated that asthma inhalers do not always give the same benefits in lung function and clinical outcomes in overweight or obese asthmatic children as they do for non-overweight asthmatic children.

The Childhood Asthma Management Program (CAMP) study is a randomized research trial which compared overweight children with asthma to non-overweight children with asthma. The study showed that children who were not overweight had more consistent and better results using asthma inhalers. Children of normal weight showed greater improvement in their bronchial airways (pulmonary function) throughout the 4 year trial, while overweight/obese children showed less improvement initially and by the end of the 4 year trial showed virtually no improvement in their lung function at all. Additionally, during this 4 year trial it was noted that the normal weight children had fewer ER visits and trips to the hospital.

Research is still in progress to determine the precise explanation for this outcome because there still is not a complete understanding of the reasons and what clinical mechanisms are involved. Given the fact that the inhaler doses were predetermined in the trial, it could not be assessed whether higher doses would have been effective in overweight children. In summary, the findings show that the treatment of asthma for overweight/obese children will require new approaches, such as simultaneous management of obesity and controlling the underlying allergy to allow for better exercise capacity.

## Oh no! It's Allergy Season and that is nothing to sneeze at!

Almost 50- million Americans face seasonal allergies, which have hit the Bay Area with a vengeance over the past few weeks. Weather conditions have a great impact on pollen counts. With the heavy rains we had this winter, the unfortunate reality is that high pollen counts are here and are predicted to increase this spring. The time is now to take action so you can enjoy the remainder of the year and won't feel the need to stay inside all spring!

If you have allergies, you may be wondering if allergy shots are the best treatment for you. After all, getting regular shots isn't anyone's idea of fun, but the possibility of being free from your allergy symptoms is usually worth it. Allergy shots work like a vaccine. Your body responds to the injected amounts of a particular allergen (given in gradually increasing doses) little by little, developing an immunity and tolerance to it. Allergy shots can lead to decreased, minimal or no allergy symptoms when you are again exposed to the allergen(s) in the shot. There is a build-up phase which involves receiving increasing amounts of the allergens and the maintenance phase when the most effective dose has been reached. When the maintenance dose is reached, there are typically longer periods between injections. We have found that most patients experience a long lasting reduction of their allergy symptoms and a higher quality of life when on immunotherapy treatment.

If you have taken a "vacation" from your allergy treatment or had been intending to start allergy shots or drops but never got around to doing so, it is time to start your immunotherapy so your body can better defend itself throughout the pollen season. Don't wait! Feel better! Live better!

## Dr. Engler Wins San Francisco's 2011 Top Docs Award!!

We would like to congratulate Dr. Engler for winning another prestigious award—he was selected as one of San Francisco's 2011 TopDocs. We would also like to thank our patients once again for giving Dr. Engler the highest of ratings. He is very honored and appreciates your vote of confidence. Thank you.