**About Allergies**

An allergy is an abnormal reaction to something that normally shouldn’t cause a reaction. The substance we are reacting to is called an allergen. In most people, the body’s immune system recognizes allergens as harmless and deals with them without our even being aware of them. In the allergic person, however, something goes wrong. The immune system malfunctions and "over reacts" to the allergen as if it is dangerous to the body. This reaction results in the symptoms we associate with allergies.

**What are the symptoms of allergies?**

* Sneezing
* Watery/Itchy eyes
* Headaches
* Cold symptoms
* Persistent cough that won’t go away
* Vomiting and/or diarrhea
* Chronic stuffy nose
* Recurrent sinus infections
* Recurrent ear infections
* Skin rashes
* Asthma symptoms such as coughing, wheezing, shortness of breath and tightness in chest.

Many factors can affect the seriousness of allergy problems: good nutrition, exercise, environmental problems and exposure to irritants such as tobacco smoke and perfumes, even emotions and stress can play a part in some allergies. It is important to note carefully when, where and under precisely what circumstances your symptom occur. You might want to take a moment now and jot down any information you have in this regard.

**Can anyone become allergic?**

Yes, although children and young adults generally seem to most affected. Also, development of an allergy to a particular substance is an acquired condition. You are not born with an allergy, but only with the capacity to develop one.

**Can Asthma be due to an allergy?**

Yes, frequently. It is one of the more complex allergy diseases, with more than 10 million sufferers.

**When should you consult an allergist?**

If allergy problems are mild and occur only occasionally, they may respond to simple forms of treatment that can be administered by almost any physician. lf however, allergy problems are chronic, fail to respond to simple treatments, interfere with optimal functioning, or affect the quality of life, then an allergist should be consulted.

**What are the most common allergies?**

* Tree pollen
* House dust
* Weed pollen
* Animal hair and dander
* Grass pollen
* Insect venom
* Foods
* Chemicals, including drugs
* Molds
* Contact Allergens
* Dyes/cosmetics
* Certain plant oleoresins

**How do you know if you are allergic to something?**

Sometimes it is obvious. For instance, if you get red and watery eyes, runny nose and sneezy when a cat jumps into your lap, you can assume that you are allergic to most cats. In a majority of situations, however, you should be very careful in interpreting your observations as to what causes your allergic condition. for example, it’s not the highly visible golden rod, but the ragweed that causes most allergy symptoms during the fall season. Also, you might blame a certain food for your skin rash and stop eating it. ln reality, however, rather than this food, another ingredient in the dish could be the culprit, Without seeking an expert opinion, to rigidly limit your diet because you suspect food allergies will not only cause unnecessary hardship, it might even lead to nutritional deficiencies. The first step for an allergist to sort out the confusion as to whether you have any allergies and what are the inciting agents, is to obtain a detailed medical and environmental history. The doctor will then perform a thorough examination of the affected areas. Once it is established that there is enough ground to suspect significant allergies, he will attempt to find out the specific allergies to which you are sensitive. The most commonly used procedure for this purposes is allergy skin testing.

During the first stage of this testing, our office nurse will prick the skin with disposable plastic devices, each coated with and allergen. After 15 to 20 minutes, the doctor reads these tests and may proceed to the next stage, the intraderrnal testing. A diluted formula of the antigen is injected into the middle layer of the skin. This is performed when the prick test is equivocal and yet suspicion of allergy persists, To individualize the results for each patient, we also employ controls in our testing. Despite the horror stories you might have heard, an overwhelming majority of the patients that have undergone skin testing inform us that the discomfort associated with this procedure is minimal.

**Skin Testing Precautions:**

To obtain proper results, the patient should stop taking all antihistamines or decongestants (such as Allegra, Zyrtec, Clarinex, Rynatan, Sudafed, Dimetapp, Benadryl and Claritan) for a period of at least 4-5 days prior to skin testing. This list also includes many over the counter preparations such as cold remedies, cough drops, diet pills, and sleep aids ( for example: Tylenol PM, Advil PM, and Nyquil). To avoid errors, please check with our staff in advance regarding each of your medications.

Patient should not stop any of the other medications, including nose sprays (except Astelin which should be stopped), inhalers and medications for other conditions than allergies, without first checking with this office, ss part of the evaluations, a breathing test, sinus or chest X-rays, blood tests and other lab tests might be requested.

**Can an allergist cure allergies?**

There are no "cure" for allergies, but there are ways to minimize certain allergic problems and control others.

To this end, the doctor will recommend a comprehensive program that consists of allergen avoidance (when possible), minimal medication usage and immunotherapy (when indicted). For example, if you are allergic to dust, molds, animals, or pollen, the various measures to reduce exposure to these allergens and irritants will be discussed. In the event of a positive reaction to foods, the strategy will be one of total avoidance for a period of three to four weeks, followed by gradual introduction and close observation for some of those foods as decided by the physician.

We also believe that safe and effective use of any medication is only possible when the patient gains a complete understanding of his prescription. Especially during the first visit and subsequent visits as well, please bring in all the medications you are taking so that the doctor can alert you of any possible interactions between these medications and the ones he is going to use to treat your allergies. He will also thoroughly review with you the usage of the latter. In the event you do not understand, or have questions, please feel free to check with our staff you will also receive instructions on how to use devices such as metered close inhalers and peak flow meters. If your pharmacist raises any questions or gives advice that is in conflict with what you believe to be the doctor’s instructions, please call us before using the medication.