



Allergies

Allergies are an overreaction of the immune system in which the body responds to a substance that it believes is harmful by creating antibodies against it. This reaction does not happen the first time a person is exposed to a substance, but the next time the person is exposed, the body's immune system releases chemicals, such as histamine, to protect itself from substances such as dust mites, pollen, and even some foods. Allergic symptoms do not always require treatment unless the symptoms are severe, chronic, or associated with other conditions like asthma or sinus infection.

Allergic rhinitis (Hay fever)

Allergic rhinitis, also known as "hay fever," is an irritation and inflammation of the inside of the nose due to exposure to an allergic trigger, such as pollen. Common symptoms are watery eyes, sneezing, runny nose with constant sniffles, watery nasal drainage, and itchy eyes/nose. Some children may use the palm of their hand to push the nose up in an attempt to relieve itching. This is called the "allergic salute" and can create a horizontal crease across the bridge of the nose in children with chronic allergies. Some children experience allergic rhinitis all year round while others are affected only at certain times of the year. Sometimes allergy symptoms may be attributed mistakenly to a cold, but there are key differences. While both cause runny noses, wheezing, sneezing and watery, itchy eyes, only colds cause fever, aches and pains. Allergy symptoms occur almost immediately after exposure to an allergen, while colds take a few days to hit full force. And while allergy symptoms can be chronic, colds usually clear up within a week.

Food allergies

There is no cure for food allergies, but avoiding the food will prevent the allergic reaction. Food allergies cause a reaction that may affect the gastrointestinal tract, respiratory system, skin and even cardiovascular system. Even a trace amount of a problem food can cause a reaction in some individuals. Some people can even have a reaction to the smell of the food.

Sometimes a food allergy will cause an anaphylactic reaction—a sudden, severe, potentially fatal, systemic allergic reaction that can involve various areas of the body, including the skin, respiratory tract, gastrointestinal tract, and cardiovascular system. Symptoms usually occur within minutes to two hours after contact with the allergy-causing substance. Anaphylactic reactions can be mild to life-threatening. Some of the common foods that can cause anaphylactic reactions are peanuts, tree nuts such as walnuts and cashews, fish, shellfish, milk and eggs. Food-induced anaphylaxis is believed to cause about 30,000 trips to the emergency room and between 150 to 200 deaths each year.

Atopic dermatitis

Atopic dermatitis is a red, itchy, inflamed rash most often seen on the belly, arms, legs, ankles or necks of small children. It may start in the first year of life, and causes itching that may worsen with hot weather, warm clothes, illness, and the use of certain soaps and other products on the skin. Allergic dermatitis may also get worse with exposure to certain foods such as egg whites, peanuts, strawberries, tomatoes and citrus. In many children, the rash symptoms will improve with age.

Conjunctivitis

Conjunctivitis is the inflammation of the conjunctiva—a clear membrane that coats the inner aspect of the eyelids and the outer surface of the eye. There are three types: bacterial, viral and allergic conjunctivitis. Allergic conjunctivitis is not contagious and causes eyes to be red, itchy and watery but usually without any discharge.

Resources

www.sciencedaily.com

National Jewish Medical and Research Center: www.njc.org

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology:
www.aaaai.org

Food and Allergy Network: www.foodallergy.org

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