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Advice From Your Allergist on Asthma Diagnosis and Treatment

How is asthma diagnosed?

Allergists are doctors who have specialized training and experience to help you understand and control your asthma. When you visit an allergist, the doctor will:

- Ask you about your medical history, including your general health, your symptoms, and whether other members of your family have asthma or allergies such as hay fever, hives or skin rashes like eczema.
- Ask you about your asthma symptoms. The allergist will want to know when symptoms occur, how often they happen and what seems to bring them on.
- Do a physical exam.
- Test your breathing. The allergist will measure how your lungs are working with a quick and painless test called spirometry. The test measures how much air you can blow out of your lungs after taking a deep breath.

The allergist may also order other tests such as blood tests or allergy tests. Allergy tests can be done at any age and can be helpful in finding out if your asthma is triggered by allergies.

Effective asthma treatment includes monitoring control with a peak flow meter, identifying and avoiding allergen triggers, using drug

therapies such as bronchodilators and anti-inflammatory agents, and developing an emergency plan for severe attacks.

Trigger Avoidance

Once your allergist has identified factors that trigger your asthma, you can learn how to avoid them. This is the most important first step to controlling your asthma. In some cases, avoidance can be just as effective as taking medicine.

Medicines

There are two types of medicines to treat asthma: “quick-relief” medicines and “controller” medicines.

- Quick-relief medicines. Everyone with asthma should carry a quick-relief medicine at all times to treat asthma symptoms that can occur anytime. These medicines help open the airways quickly. They also treat the noisy part of the disease—cough, wheezing and gasping for breath that can happen during an asthma attack. Your allergist may also recommend using this medicine before exercise. Examples of quick-relief medicines are albuterol and levalbuterol. For most people with well-controlled asthma, a single canister should last a full year.

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Quick-relief medicines can stop asthma symptoms now. However, they do not prevent future symptoms nor do they control the underlying problem that causes the symptoms in the first place. If you need your quick-relief medicine more than twice a week or more than two nights a month, then your asthma is NOT well controlled. Be sure to tell your allergist.

- Controller medicines are taken daily for long-term control. Some people need this type of medicine to treat the quiet part of asthma – the underlying inflammation that causes the airways in the lungs to become inflamed and swollen. If your allergist prescribes this type of medicine, it should be taken every day, even when you feel well, to prevent symptoms.

Allergy Shots

If your asthma is triggered by an allergy, you should consider allergy shots. Allergy shots, which are also known as immunotherapy, are very effective in relieving allergy symptoms and, in some cases, can actually cure your allergy.

The treatment builds up immunity to your offending allergens, usually over several years. It works by injecting small amounts of the allergen in gradually increasing amounts over time. As the shots help your immune system build up tolerance to the effects of the allergen, they eventually reduce and can even eliminate your allergy symptoms. Allergy shots should only be administered by staff that has

training and experience in handling a reaction you could have after receiving an allergy shot.

Anti-IgE

Anti-IgE is a treatment that stops an allergic reaction before it begins, helping prevent asthma attacks by blocking the antibody that causes the reaction. The treatment is approved for patients age 12 and older who have moderate-to-severe allergic asthma. Anti-IgE is different from immunotherapy but it is also given by injection. Anti-IgE should only be administered by staff that has training and experience in handling a reaction you could have after receiving an injection of anti-IgE.

Anyone with allergies and asthma should be able to feel good, be active all day and sleep well at night. No one should accept less. Your allergist can:

- Identify the source of your suffering and develop a treatment plan to eliminate symptoms.
- Provide you with the most cost-effective care and best outcomes.

Get tested! Get treated! Get better!



For more information about allergy treatment, and to locate a board-certified allergist in your area, visit AllergyAndAsthmaRelief.org.

Board-certified allergists are specialists in diagnosing and treating allergies and asthma.