LEARN ABOUT ANOTHER WAY TO TREAT YOUR ALLERGIES

Nationwide Allergy™

WHAT ARE ALLERGIES?

It's probably not something that you think about, but every time you open your mouth or inhale, tiny particles from the environment that are floating in the air can get into your nose and lungs. The immune system reacts to bad particles to protect the body against things that are harmful, such as bacteria and viruses that can lead to colds. But it can also react to harmless particle allergens that it thinks are a threat and attack them, causing the symptoms of allergies.

This is called an allergic reaction and causes allergy symptoms such as a stuffy or runny nose (rhinitis), sneezing, and itchy, watery eyes. These symptoms can be caused by outdoor or indoor allergens.

If you or a family member suffer from allergy symptoms like sneezing and itchy eyes, you're not alone. As many as 50 million people in the United States are affected by an allergy. Allergies can affect you or your family in many ways that may keep you from being able to do the things you enjoy.

FOR MANY PEOPLE WITH ALLERGIES, EVEN THE MOST BEAUTIFUL DAY CAN BE A MISERABLE ONE

Sneezing through picnics

Rubbing itchy, watery eyes at the game

Hiking with a runny nose

ALLERGENS MAY INCLUDE:

HOW CAN ALLERGIES AFFECT YOU OR A FAMILY MEMBER?

As people who have allergies know, symptoms can make it hard to carry on with daily activities. For example, symptoms caused by an allergy to pollen, known as hay fever, can range from mild to miserable.

Sometimes people do not realize that their symptoms are caused by an allergic reaction to an allergen. For example, people may not realize a mild allergy is causing them to sneeze or have a runny nose when there is a lot of pollen in the air or a pet is nearby.

More severe allergy symptoms may be confused for an illness, such as

Common cold

Sinus infection

Ear infection

Headache

Cough

People with allergies may not be aware of how much allergy symptoms are affecting their lives. Many people have to avoid doing certain activities, going places, or having a pet. Others may miss school or work or have trouble paying attention. And for those with the most severe cases, their allergies may even be life-threatening.

HOW ARE ALLERGIES DIAGNOSED?

3 KEY STEPS IN THE PROCESS OF ALLERGY DIAGNOSIS

1. patient's medical history
2. a physical examination
3. allergy testing

If you or a family member schedule a doctor's appointment to discuss allergy symptoms, or you bring it up during a routine office visit, the doctor will have many questions about you or your family member's health and allergy symptoms.

For example, the doctor may ask:

- *What are the symptoms?*
- *How long have you been experiencing symptoms?*
- *What time of year do symptoms occur?*
- *What seems to cause symptoms?*

A physical exam will follow. If the diagnosis is allergic rhinitis, the doctor may perform a skin or blood test. This will help him or her find what may be causing the allergies.

It is important for you to work closely with your doctor to treat allergy symptoms. Together, you can create a treatment plan that will be best for you or your family member. If you are visiting a primary care doctor, he or she may refer you to a specialist.

IT IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO WORK CLOSELY WITH YOUR DOCTOR TO TREAT ALLERGY SYMPTOMS.

THERE ARE SEVERAL WAYS TO TREAT YOUR ALLERGIES

COMPLETE ALLERGEN AVOIDANCE

It is advised that you try to avoid the allergens that triggers your allergic reaction, but it's not always possible.

MEDICATIONS THAT TREAT SYMPTOMS

These medications can offer you effective, though temporary, allergy symptom relief. Some examples include antihistamines, decongestants, nasal steroid sprays, cromolyn sodium (anti-inflammatory medicine), eye drops, and other medicines your doctor may recommend.

Some of these medicines are available without a prescription, while others require a prescription.

ALLERGY IMMUNOTHERAPY (AIT)

It is thought that AIT works with your body's natural defenses. However, the exact way it works is not known.

AIT is another option. It is recommended for people who cannot avoid allergens, or for people who are not satisfied with their current medicines used to treat allergy symptoms.

WHAT IS ALLERGY IMMUNOTHERAPY (AIT)?

The basic approach to controlling an allergy sounds easy—just avoid the allergens that cause your allergic symptoms. However, avoiding these things is not always possible.

This is when AIT can help by working with the body's natural defense system. AIT slowly trains the immune system to be less sensitive to allergens, so that it doesn't respond too strongly to them. This is done by introducing tiny amounts of the allergen to the body over time, slowly getting the immune system used to the allergen.

Then, when the body is exposed to the allergen during normal day-to-day activity, the immune system doesn't try to attack it. This can mean you or your family member may have fewer allergy symptoms.

AIT HAS BEEN USED FOR OVER 100 YEARS.

In 1911, 2 scientists, recognizing that pollen was the cause of hay fever, thought that they could help reduce or eliminate symptoms by injecting hay fever patients with the pollen to which they were allergic.

THEIR EXPERIMENT WORKED.

IF YOU THINK YOU MAY HAVE ALLERGIES AND WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ALLERGY TREATMENT OPTIONS, ASK YOUR DOCTOR.

FORMS OF AIT

There are 2 common types of AIT: allergy shots or sublingual (under the tongue) tablets.

SUBLINGUAL AIT TABLETS

Small doses of a specific allergen are given as a tablet under the tongue

ALLERGY SHOTS

Injections of allergens are given in an increasing dose over time

IS AIT RIGHT FOR ME?

Keep in mind that AIT may not be right for everyone. AIT can cause increased allergy symptoms, such as sneezing, nasal congestion, and hives. The administration of AIT has been associated with severe, life-threatening systemic reactions, including anaphylaxis and death.

Serious reactions may also include:

—trouble breathing
—throat tightness or swelling
—trouble swallowing or speaking
—dizziness or fainting
—rapid or weak heartbeat
—severe stomach cramps or pain
—vomiting
—diarrhea
—severe flushing or itching of the skin.

These symptoms require immediate medical attention. If you have asthma, it should be well-controlled before AIT since you may be more likely to have serious side effects. If AIT is right for you or your family member, you and your doctor will design a treatment plan together.

THE AIT CONVERSATION

It's important to work with your doctor to

1. **Find out** if you or a family member has an allergy
2. **Identify** what's causing it, and
3. **Develop** a treatment plan

Don't hesitate to ask about treatment options. Here are sample questions that can help you or your family member get the most out of talking to a doctor:

- *What are my treatment options?*
- *How effective are these options?*
- *Is AIT the right approach?*
- *What are the risks and benefits associated with AIT?*
- *What are my AIT options?*
- *How is AIT started?*
- *How much of a commitment is AIT?*

LEARN ABOUT ANOTHER WAY TO TREAT YOUR ALLERGIES

Look inside to learn about:

- Different kinds of allergies and their causes
- How allergies are diagnosed
- Allergy treatments, including allergy immunotherapy (AIT)
- How AIT may help your allergy symptoms
- Talking to your doctor about allergies and treatment options

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