

2008 Monthly ES&H Campaign: June Allergies

Monday, 2nd

What are Allergies?

Allergies are an abnormal response of the immune system to usually harmless substances in the environment. Substances that cause this reaction are called allergens. Examples of allergens include pollen, mold, animal dander, certain foods, and house dust. Allergies affect at least 20 percent of Americans.

Symptoms

Symptoms of an allergic reaction may be categorized as mild, moderate, or severe. The symptoms of mild allergic reactions typically include skin rash, congestion, and eye irritation. Symptoms of a moderate allergic reaction include the symptoms for mild reactions along with an increase in itchiness and difficulty breathing. Severe allergic reaction or Anaphylaxis is a rare occurrence where the whole body is affected. It usually begins with itchy eyes and quickly transcends into more serious symptoms, including abdominal pain, cramps, vomiting, diarrhea, dizziness, and varying degrees of swellings that can make breathing and swallowing difficult. The severity of an allergic reaction may vary from individual to individual; seek medical assistance whenever a significant reaction is suspected!

Prevention

Most people learn to recognize what they are allergic to through experience. In order to recognize allergy triggers, you have to be aware of changes to the environment and your daily life. An allergist (an allergy specialist) can also identify triggers by utilizing several different types of allergy tests. The following tests are used when identifying allergic triggers:

- Skin testing is the most widely used and the most helpful. There are several different methods, but all involve exposing the skin to small amounts of various substances and observing the reactions over time.
- Blood tests generally identify immunoglobulin E (a class of antibodies most abundant in tissue spaces) to specific antigens (a substance that stimulates the production of an antibody when introduced into the body).
- Other tests involve eliminating certain allergens from your environment and then re-introducing them to see if a reaction occurs.

An auto-injector may also be prescribed to people with a history of serious or anaphylactic reaction. An auto-injector kit contains a pre-measured dose of epinephrine (a hormone that is secreted by the adrenal gland in response to physical or mental stress). This kit is carried at all times and injected immediately if exposed to a substance that causes severe allergic reaction.

Treatment

There is no cure for allergies, but there are several types of over-the-counter and prescriptions medicines to help relieve symptoms like congestions and runny nose. These medicines include antihistamines, decongestants, combination (antihistamines and decongestants) medicines, corticosteroids and others. Allergy shots are also effective in gradually increasing the ability to tolerate allergens. If you frequently experience allergies, consult with a physician to determine what prevention and treatment options are available to minimize discomfort.

References:

<http://www.webmd.com>

<http://www.dictionary.com>



Visit the Communications ES&H website for more information.



Communications