



By: Dr. Rima Sanka

You may have read my introductory articles to allergic disease in the last two issues of CityMasala. My name is Dr. Rima Sanka and I recently completed my fellowship training at USF in Adult and Pediatric Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology. One of the main roles played by allergists is to educate patients on what their true allergies are, how to avoid them, and how to treat and/or cure them so they may live a healthy lifestyle. I hope that this column will answer some of the common questions, verify or refute common allergy myths, and empower you to make positive decisions with regard to your health and allergies.

Wheezing, coughing, chest tightness and trouble breathing, especially early in the morning or at night....these are all symptoms of asthma.

Asthma is a chronic disease that affects your airways. It affects more than 20 million Americans.

Asthma is characterized by **inflammation** and spasm of the airways. Your airways are tubes that carry air in and out of your lungs. If you have asthma, the inside walls of your airways become sore and swollen. That makes them very sensitive, and they may react strongly to things that you are allergic to or find irritating.

Spasm (narrowing of the bronchial tubes) is caused by the inflammation of the muscles surrounding the air passageways. The inflammation makes the airways smaller which makes it difficult to move air in and out of the lung. When your airways react, they narrow and your lungs get less air. This can cause wheezing, coughing, chest tightness and trouble breathing, especially early in the morning or at night.

When your asthma symptoms become worse than usual, it's called an asthma attack. In a severe asthma attack, the airways can close so that your

vital organs do not get enough oxygen. In some cases, people die from severe asthma attacks.

Of the 20 million asthmatics, 10 million - including 3 million children - suffer specifically from **allergic asthma**. Research shows that many people with asthma could better control their disease by controlling their allergies.

Allergic asthma is the most common form of asthma. Allergic asthma is triggered by inhaling allergens such as dust mites, pet dander, pollens, mold, etc. These allergens cause airways of the lungs to become inflamed and swollen. This results in coughing, wheezing and chest tightness.

Allergens are the key cause of allergic asthma. But the real culprit is the IgE antibody that is produced by the body in response to allergen exposure. The combination of the IgE antibody with allergens results in the release of potent chemicals. Thus, IgE is the root cause of allergic asthma.

To find out if you or a family member may have allergic asthma, you can take the brief survey from the American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology on <http://www.aaaai.org/>

allergicasthma/#quiz.

If you answered yes to any of the questions on the survey, an asthma specialist, such as an allergist/immunologist, will identify your allergic triggers and develop a plan to improve your health.

Asthma is treated with two kinds of medicines: quick-relief medicines to stop asthma symptoms and long-term control medicines to prevent symptoms.

Allergens cannot be totally avoided. Another way to control allergic asthma is to take a medication that binds IgE and prevents it from setting off the inflammatory response. **There is a lot of exciting new research regarding asthma and genetics, nutrition, and alternative therapies.** Your allergist can provide you with more information on the treatment options that are best for you.

Thank you for your interest. Stay tuned for my next few articles covering the following topics: hives, eczema, food allergies, and drug allergies. www.allergydoc.us.



The Parents' ChatRoom

By: Dr. Maulik Trivedi

Q. Dr. Trivedi - I have a daughter who is severely handicapped - she is almost 12 and is in a wheelchair. I have a good handle on how to take care of all her medical needs and she is, by and large, a very well adjusted child in spite of her handicap. However, I do fear for her on a psychological level, especially as she is growing older. How can I ensure that she be as happy as possible knowing that she can never be as "normal" as the girls around her?

Sukriti from Lutz

A. Your question raises a beautiful point about one's identity. More specifically, as your daughter enters young adulthood, will her identity be defined mainly by her physical challenge? Your question also raises awareness that physical challenge can, and often does, lead to psychological compromise.

I would encourage you to view your dilemma as follows. Each one of us is made up of a physical self, a psychological self and a spiritual self. Physical aberrations often lead to life challenges such as what your daughter is facing. These challenges, if not managed at a psychological and spiritual level, can lead to much unhappiness in life for your daughter. If you encourage your daughter's identity to be shaped by her character (her psychological and spiritual self), then she will have the power to overcome any physical challenge that life may present her with.

As she gets older, it is important for you to encourage her emotional and spiritual growth. Facing emotional issues and finding answers to them is recommended over being over-protective towards her. Watching movies, reading stories and books about people who have lived and conquered challenging lives would provide a great boost to her psychological self-esteem and spirituality.

Help your daughter develop her individual identity with emotional and spiritual qualities. This will allow others to see your daughter's identity beyond her handicap. Do not allow your daughter, yourself, or others to feel sorry for her. Be supportive of her dreams, no matter how impossible they may seem to you. Be with her as she discovers the joy in living.

Q. Dear Dr. Trivedi - I have a sister who is almost 16 years younger than I am. After I got married and moved to the US, I realized that I would have problems having children of my own. After 7 years of trying, I started to think that we should try to get my sister here and help to create a better life for her with our love and support. She is almost 16 now and we would be a family to her. Maybe this would help to take away some of my unhappiness at not having a child of my own. I just want to make sure that I would be doing the right thing not only for ourselves but also for her.
Maya from Orlando

A. Maya, you seem to have answered your own

question. It is very necessary to determine what your sister wants. Given willingness on both sides, your proposed solution is a very feasible one.

As you explore the possibilities, here's what to watch out for. It would be wise for you to remember that you are fulfilling your own emotional desire for a daughter. Your sister is not fulfilling a lack of mothering. If you go through the process, and if you are not careful, this latter point may bring forth conflicts in your relationship.

Here is how that happens. While you are busy catching up on your mothering needs, which make you treat her in a very nurturing and protective way, your sister is at the stage of becoming her own independent, self-sufficient person. She's almost done with being nurtured at 16, and will want to be independent by 18. Therefore, if certain things are not managed from the beginning, you are likely to face conflicts in your relationship.

First and foremost of these are expectations. What you expect may not be what you get. This applies to all persons involved in this situation. But, if everyone involved is mature enough to accept this and make decisions by respecting this, then a beautiful outcome is yours to enjoy.

Dr. Trivedi is a Board-Certified Psychiatrist. He treats children, adolescents and adults. Please visit www.MINDvantage.com for more information. Send your questions to: theparentschatroom@citymasala.com.