



## **Childhood Allergies – Nothing to Sneeze At!**

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Allergies are on the rise in children, and they come in many forms. Eczema (or atopic dermatitis), asthma and hay fever (or allergic rhinitis) are all considered forms of allergy. It is estimated that anywhere from 15 to 30 percent of the general population has some form of allergies, with 10 to 15 percent of all children being “allergic.”

Did you know that if you have allergies, your child is more likely to have allergies? And if mom and dad have the same type of allergies, that increases the child’s likelihood of having allergies to 72 percent!

Many different things can trigger these allergies. Some children’s symptoms appear after eating certain foods, while others may be in response to pollens in the air or dust mites in the home. It is sometimes hard to figure out exactly which is the culprit.

Allergic rhinitis is the most common of all allergies. It is often recognized as sneezing, nasal congestion and an itchy, runny nose. Children may cough or excessively clear their throat due to postnasal drip.

Children with allergic rhinitis often have very characteristic facial features, such as dark circles under the eyes known as “allergic shiners.” They tend to breathe through the mouth because the nose is obstructed. They may rub their nose often, leaving a wrinkle across the tip of their nose. Some may even have itchy, watery, red eyes known as allergic conjunctivitis. They may snore and have very disrupted sleep, which can leave them drowsy during the day.

There are two types of allergic rhinitis, seasonal and perennial. Seasonal is usually caused by nonflowering, wind-pollinated plants. Many of these plants have different pollinating seasons, with tree pollens arising in the early spring and grass pollens in the late summer/early autumn. Perennial is more often caused by dust mites; animal dander, including dander from cats and dogs; and molds. Neither type of allergic rhinitis is usually caused by food allergens.

What can you do to help prevent these allergies? Unfortunately, you can’t change your genetics. But there are some things you can do to help. The lining of the nose becomes overly sensitive to different allergens and environmental triggers, like cigarette smoke and perfumes, so these things should be avoided. Antihistamines help itching, sneezing and runny noses, but not nasal congestion. The newer intranasal steroids have really helped improve the quality of life of children with allergic rhinitis, without the side effects associated with taking steroids orally. Some children may be candidates for skin testing and allergy shots if their symptoms are uncontrolled by avoiding allergens and taking daily medications. There are many new allergy products on the market, including liners for pillows and mattresses to reduce dust mite exposure, and high-efficiency particulate air filters (HEPA) for your air-conditioning units. These products are excellent at reducing the exposure to certain allergens, but not without cost – they are fairly expensive! Just remember that every little bit you can do will help your child and you feel better.