

Asthma and Allergy Awareness

The month of May marks an important observance for health awareness including two closely linked conditions—asthma and allergies.

What are allergies, and what is considered an allergen? Allergies are immune system reactions to foreign substances that are typically harmless to most people. These substances, known as allergens, can provoke symptoms in the nose, throat, lungs, ears, sinuses, lining of the stomach, or on the skin. The most common types of allergies include pollen allergies, food allergies, drug allergies, and pet allergies. Each type has specific triggers and symptoms, making accurate diagnosis and personalized management crucial. Some triggers for allergies can also include seasonal pollen, certain foods, pet dander, and medications. Like asthma, effective management involves identifying and avoiding these triggers whenever possible.

What is Asthma? Asthma is a chronic respiratory condition distinguished by inflamed and narrowed airways, leading to episodes of wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness, and coughing. These episodes are often referred to as asthma attacks, can vary in both frequency and severity among different people with asthma. Additionally, asthma triggers can range widely from environmental allergens like pollen and mold, irritants such as smoke and strong odors, or respiratory infections and physical activity. There are several types of asthma, including allergic (triggered by allergens), non-allergic (triggered by factors not related to allergies), exercise-induced bronchoconstriction (EIB), and occupational asthma, each with its unique triggers and management approaches.

- Allergic asthma – Activated by exposure to allergens, such as pollen, dust mites, pet dander, mold, and certain foods. These allergens cause an immune response that leads to inflammation and constriction of the airways.
- Non-allergic asthma – Unlike allergic asthma, non-allergic asthma is not triggered by allergens. Instead, it can be triggered by factors such as stress, exercise, cold air, viral infections, smoke, and air pollution.
- Exercise-induced Bronchoconstriction (EIB) – Also called exercise-induced asthma, is triggered by physical activity. The condition occurs when the airways narrow as a response to exercise, particularly in cold or dry air environments.
- Occupational Asthma – Caused by exposure to irritants in the workplace. These irritants can include chemicals, dust, gases, fumes, and other substances encountered in various industries such as manufacturing, farming, hairdressing, and healthcare.

National Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month plays a crucial role in enhancing understanding and management of asthma and allergies. This observance empowers millions worldwide by focusing on symptoms, triggers, and effective management strategies, especially

during the peak season for sufferers. Understanding and avoiding personal triggers is a key step in managing asthma and allergies effectively. By promoting asthma and allergy awareness, we can improve the quality of life for those affected by these conditions.

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