Basic Information Regarding Allergies

The immune system is the interface of your body with the world. It functions in identification and detoxification of foreign substances that come into our environment. Unfortunately, our surroundings are overwhelmed with foreign or harmful substances much of the time, primarily due to increasing levels of air pollution. The immune system is also where allergy symptoms and reactions originate.

An allergy is an overreaction by the body's immune system to a substance that is ordinarily harmless. There are three basic types of allergy: Inhalant, Food, and Chemical. The most common inhalant allergens are dust, molds, pollens, and animal dander. People can also be allergic to any food they eat. Chemicals, including medications, can also cause allergic symptoms. Allergic individuals can be sensitive to more than one allergen and more than one type of allergen. New sensitivities can develop at any time; however, sensitivity usually occurs only after repeated exposure to a substance.

It is important to decrease your allergic load as much as possible. Allergic load is the summation of stressors and toxins you encounter that create an allergic response, and other factors which may challenge your immune system (e.g., illness, pregnancy, and physical, environmental, or emotional stresses).

Allergic Load: The Bucket Theory

| Walls of the bucket | The immune system’s capacity |
| Water level in the bucket | Summation of your load |
| Water overflow | Symptoms |
| Mat under the bucket | Medications |
| Stress | Lowered walls of the bucket & increased water levels |
| Immunotherapy | Raised walls of the bucket |
| Avoidance therapy | Allows less water in the bucket |

Every allergen and every patient is unique. Different allergens elicit different reactions, and different patients react differently to various allergens. An allergy sufferer may experience upper respiratory disturbances, rashes and hives, recurrent ear infections, laryngitis, or gastrointestinal distress. In some instances, food allergy may cause many of the same symptoms as inhalant allergy, likewise with chemical sensitivities. This makes it difficult to determine exactly what substance is causing a reaction without testing.

The physicians of Hilton Head ENT use skin testing to identify inhalant and food allergies. The results of that testing are used to create allergy serum for drops for patients specific to their inhalant allergies. Any allergy patient, if exposed to the same things on a repeated basis, will become allergic to those things (this includes foods and chemicals in addition to inhalants). If food allergies are thought to be a part of the problem, this will be discussed and appropriate dietary adjustments outlined.

Chemical allergies may also contribute to allergic symptoms. Most allergy patients are sensitive to strong scents, and some have an actual chemical allergy. You may find that strong, heavily scented fragrances or odors (perfumes, colognes, potpourri, chlorine, formaldehyde, tobacco smoke, gas fumes, cleaning products, etc.) aggravate symptoms. Therefore, it is recommended that allergy patients, and those in their presence, abstain from the use of any heavily scented products or other chemical substances. Also, choose unscented products for home and personal use. Other chemicals that allergy patients should avoid are those used in food products, such as dyes, nitrates, and MSG. Hilton Head ENT currently does not perform testing for chemical allergies.

**PLEASE DO NOT WEAR PERFUME OR COLOGNE WHEN COMING TO OUR OFFICE OUT OF RESPECT FOR THE HEALTH OF CHEMICALLY SENSITIVE AND ALLERGY PATIENTS**
Decrease Allergic Load

1. *Isolate the allergen or allergen producing item.* For example, mattress encasings can keep you from coming in contact with dust mites which are living and multiplying in your mattress and box springs.

2. *Remove the allergen or allergen producing items from your home and particularly your bedroom.* Any of the common allergens or other items that bring on your symptoms should be taken from your breathing space. For example, if you have a pet, it is best that the animal stay outside. If it is not possible for the animal to live outside, keep it out of your bedroom and DO NOT let it sleep with you.

3. *Ventilate to remove allergens or pollutants.* This can be helpful to dilute tobacco smoke, odors, and chemical fumes. These substances should be avoided by the allergic or sensitive person.

4. *Filter allergens from the air.* High performance filters (HEPA - high efficiency particulate arrestor) in the central air system can remove dust, pollen, dander, and mold which all contribute to total allergic load. Room air purifiers can provide a continuous supply of clean, allergen-free air in smaller spaces for working and sleeping.

5. *Recognize the need to make your bedroom as allergen-free as possible.* You spend more time in your bedroom than any other room in your home, assuming you sleep in your bedroom for at least 6 hours a day. Breathing clean air while you sleep gives your immune system an opportunity to recuperate from awake-time exposures.

6. *Consult with your physician about improving your nutrition.* Foods contain energy, nutrients, and other components that effect health and the mechanics of the body. Proper nutrition is an important aspect of overall wellness and immune function.

7. *Lower your stress level.* Stress lowers your resistance to allergen exposures, as mentioned above.

8. *Engage in physical activity.* Moderate physical activity for 20-30 minutes a day at least 4 days a week will increase your overall wellness. Exercise is also effective in reducing stress levels and contributes to more restful sleep.

9. *Get more rest.* Fatigue compromises the body’s defenses against allergies, as well as other illnesses. Rest not only makes you look and feel better superficially, it gives your immune system a boost and support that it needs to protect your body.

10. *Take nutritional supplements.* It is impossible to derive all of the nutrients necessary for optimum health only from the foods one consumes, so it is important to supplement your diet with vitamins and minerals daily. Nutritional supplements are important in the proper function and maintenance of the body’s immune system. Antioxidants such as Beta-Carotene, Lycopene and Vitamins A, C, and E are especially effective in boosting the immune system and reducing allergic load. This is also important for children with allergies.