

# Asthma & Allergy Center

Courteous Competent Care with Compassion

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**We Want to Hear From**

## Asthma & Allergy News

### Winter 2015-16

Welcome to the newest issue of Asthma and Allergy News, the official newsletter of the Asthma and Allergy Center.

We are halfway through winter already, but there are still things you can do to make the season and your family healthier! You'll find this issue packed with information to help you and your family make the most of this season.

If you or a member of your family have questions or concerns about asthma, allergies or their treatment, we are all here to serve you. Contact us at **304-343-4300**, or visit our [website](#).

### Seven Ways to Keep Your Valentine Sneeze-free

Valentine's Day is when we show that special someone how much we care...and remembering their allergies and asthma can help *YOUR* Valentine have a great day! Asthma and allergy advice for the big day:

**Cut the cologne** Asthma and allergies can be triggered by strong smells. If your loved one has a reaction to perfume or cologne, you can rule that out as a gift, and you may want to stop wearing fragrance, too.

**Don't start the fire** Fires can be romantic, but smoke is a common asthma trigger and could make it hard to breathe. This goes for candles and cigarettes also. Stream a fireplace video on your laptop or download a "candle" app for flickering light.

**Everyone loves flowers** Unless they have allergies, that is! Even flowers from the florist can contain pollens or other allergens, which can trigger an attack. Make sure to ask before shelling out big bucks on a bouquet.

**Relaxation is key** Stress can create negative effects on the body and make allergy symptoms worse. Pack some relaxing activities in your schedule.

**Now you're cooking** Fixing a healthy meal for your Valentine can show you care and help them feel better. Make sure not to include ingredients that might cause an allergic reaction.

**Who needs candy?** People with asthma or allergies can have reactions to certain

## You!

Help us serve you and all our patients better. Send your suggestions, questions and comments to

[drkumar@wvaac.com](mailto:drkumar@wvaac.com)

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### Study Seeks Approach to Counseling About Electronic Cigarettes

In a study recently published in the [Annals of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology](#), researchers sought to find answers to safety concerns and potential benefits of switching to e-cigarettes in comparison with continuing the regular ones, if that would be the only way to "QUIT SMOKING", and improve counseling between physicians and patients.

There is a great amount of confusion surrounding e-cigarettes, for both the consumer and the provider. E-cigarettes pose less risk of toxins and carcinogens in comparison to traditional cigarettes. There is emerging evidence that switching to e-cigarette is "lesser of two evils".

The authors recommend that all healthcare professionals play an active role in reducing patients' exposure to tobacco smoke, and that may include learning about e-cigarettes.

### Penicillin Allergy:

#### Test Before You Treat

Pharmacists, Physicians, PAs and Nurse Practitioners: How often do you hear patients reported as "penicillin allergic" based on a childhood rash or information given to them by their parents' years ago?

Penicillin allergy is the most frequently reported drug allergy, with approximately 10% of general population in the US claiming to be allergic to it. However, up to 90% of these patients do not have evidence of an IgE-mediated penicillin allergy when evaluated by skin testing.

Even if the original reaction was a true allergic reaction, there is 80% chance after 10 years that the allergy has dissipated.

ingredients in candy, like nuts or dairy. Get to know your Valentine by finding out their asthma or allergy triggers.

**Clean it up** Clean the dust in your Valentine's environment to get rid of dust mites and dander that can make it harder to breathe.

### Be Ready to Beat Springtime Allergies

For people with springtime allergies, Valentine's Day is a reminder that it's almost time to start allergy medications.

Allergy symptoms like watery eyes, runny nose, sneezing and wheezing in spring are caused when we come into contact with tree pollen. This contact causes release of histamine in eyes, nose or lungs, which causes the allergy symptoms.

Allergy medications suppress or the release of histamine or block its effect. Most medications work best if started before contact with the allergen. Starting medication before symptoms start is a smart strategy.

Think about beginning your allergy medication regime soon, and if you don't have one, speak with your healthcare provider. For more information on combating your allergy symptoms, call the Asthma and Allergy Center at 304-343-4300.

### Winter Allergy News

After wearing shorts on Christmas Day, I thought we'd really dodged the bullet of winter weather this year, but the record snow storm sure proved me wrong! Following the snow many are now dealing with flooding and water seepage around their homes. This can lead to mold, which exacerbates allergies and asthma.

### Water Damage and Mold

If water in your home is not dried quickly, it can lead to mold growth, making the air inside your home unhealthy.

For large areas of damage, consider calling in a professional. You may need to remove carpets, replace dry wall and throw out furniture. Mold is hard to get rid of, and preventing seepage and moisture is the most important step to keeping mold out of your home. Should your home be affected by water damage, some helpful tips:

- Clean outside storm debris as soon as possible, as mold will grow there quickly.
- Inside, replace wet porous materials such as carpets, padding, stuffed bedding and furniture, or furnace filters.
- Replace water-soaked wallboard and sheet rock up to and above the water line.
- Wash hard-surface areas with dilute bleach solution or nontoxic white vinegar and water mixture.
- While cleaning, protect your eyes and lungs with an N-95 respirator (available in most hardware or home remodeling stores) and goggles without vents.
- Wear gloves, long sleeves, long pants and work boots.
- Run fans and/or dehumidifiers to help dry things out.

Prevent future water damage by keeping gutters clean and clearing brush and bushes away from your home – anything that will prevent drainage or cause rain water to collect around the foundation.

### Asthma, Allergies and Indoor Air

Winter means spending more time indoors, so those with asthma and allergies should pay attention to indoor air quality. Make sure stoves are vented properly and that chimneys are cleaned. Add solid doors to the fireplace opening to cut

The skin testing procedure for penicillin allergy is easy, safe and completed in approximately two hours. Following testing, patients with negative skin test results are challenged, in our office, with oral penicillin or amoxicillin to confirm their ability to tolerate penicillin.

Knowing if a patient is truly allergic offers many benefits:

- Reduction in medical costs and institution of more effective, less toxic antibiotics:
- Published studies of the routine use of penicillin testing with PRE-PEN in pre-surgical and emergency department patients with a history of penicillin allergy have demonstrated a reduction in medical costs and an institution of more effective and less toxic antibiotics.
- Restricting the development of resistant bacteria:
- Penicillin skin testing helps identify people who can safely receive **Penicillin and related** antibiotics, which helps reduce unnecessary prescriptions for broad-spectrum and more toxic **anti-infectives** such as **Fluoroquinolones** and **Vancomycin**.
- Reduce the need for penicillin desensitization.

Asthma and Allergy Center is set up to do Penicillin Allergy Testing and then Oral Challenge with a Penicillin Drug to patients that test Negative.

If you have any questions regarding penicillin allergy skin testing, please call 304-345-6500

Health Care Providers: Remember To Get Your Patients Tested BEFORE They Need the Next Antibiotic.

And DEAR READER if you or someone in your family claims or believes to be allergic to Penicillin, advise them to get in touch with our

down on as much smoke in the home as possible. Replace furnace filters, check humidifiers and clean air exchanges. Vacuum frequently. Use HEPA filters on the vacuum cleaners. Central Vac, where the dusty vacuum exhaust is discharged out of the house is the ideal choice.

#### **Additional Tips**

Be prepared with your asthma or allergy action plan and carry all necessary medications with you when you travel.

Respiratory infections such as flu or viruses can cause severe exacerbations in those with asthma or allergies. Be sure to monitor symptoms closely and seek emergency assistance if needed.

Work with your provider to create a written Asthma Action Plan and carry it with you at all times. Make sure it includes the name and number for your provider and any emergency information.

### **Allergies: Not Just for Warm Weather**

Those with pollen allergies may get a break during the winter, but those with indoor allergies can find their symptoms increased.

Some winter allergies are caused when the heating system kicks on blowing dust, mold spores and insect parts into the atmosphere. They can get in the airway and cause an allergic reaction.

Common indoor allergy triggers include dust mites, mold, animal dander and animal saliva.

Symptoms of winter allergies can include coughing, dark under-eye circles, itchy nose and eyes, sneezing, runny nose and watery eyes.

Symptoms from allergies are similar to, but last far longer than those from a cold. Luckily, allergy symptoms can be alleviated with proper treatment.

Consulting an allergist may be the most certain way to diagnose allergies and provide the best course of treatment.

### **An End to Allergy Shots!**

#### **What is sublingual immunotherapy?**

Allergy Shots, or Allergen Immunotherapy, treat the cause of allergies by injections of small doses of the allergy causing antigens. They teach your immune system tolerance to the injected allergens, thus reducing the allergy symptoms. In recent years it has been found that the antigens given orally can produce the same effect provided they are held under the tongue for a minute or two before they are swallowed or spit out. The mucus membrane under the tongue has special cells called Dendritic cells that grab the antigens and present them to the immune system for processing.

#### **How does the process work?**

The first step is to confirm a patient's allergies through allergy testing. Then, a custom-mixed vial of drops is prepared for the patient. The patient takes drops under the tongue daily. During the first few weeks the dose is gradually increased. After that, in the "maintenance phase," the patient takes the same dose of drops each day.

#### **Is sublingual immunotherapy safe?**

It is considered safer than allergy shots for both adults and children. Patients take the drops in the convenience of their own homes instead of having to go to the doctor's office every week for shots. An EpiPen should always be at hand just in case. The World Health Organization (WHO) has endorsed sublingual immunotherapy as a viable alternative to injection immunotherapy.

#### **Does it work?**

Many published scientific studies have shown that it is as effective as injections and is in fact more beneficial because of better compliance.

#### **How long is it continued?**

For long lasting benefit it is advised to be continued for three to five years, the same as allergy injections.

office. There is 90% chance that they can take Penicillin after testing.

**We look forward to hearing from You!**

Help us serve you and all our patients better. Please send your questions and comments to: [drkumar@wvaac.com](mailto:drkumar@wvaac.com)

**How do I start sublingual immunotherapy?**

Call the Asthma and Allergy Center to schedule allergy testing and an evaluation to see if you are likely to benefit from sublingual immunotherapy. If you are, the vials take one to two weeks to mix. A member of our medical staff will see you two or more times a year to monitor your progress..

**What are the costs? Will it be covered by insurance?**

Most insurance plans do not cover sublingual immunotherapy as it is considered an "off-label" use by the FDA. The antigens used for oral administration are approved by the FDA for injections only. As for the cost, many find them to be a more economical choice when the cost of injections and of the lost time and inconvenience of weekly injection visit to the doctor 's office are added up. For more information, please contact our office at 304-343-4300 or [CLICK HERE here for an "Effective Healthcare Report" from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality of the US Dept. of Health and Human Resources on Allergy Shots and Allergy Drops.](#)

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With a little planning, you and your family can enjoy all the fun that comes with fluffy snow and time spent indoors with family. All of us at the Asthma and Allergy Center are at your service to help you have a HEALTHY, HAPPY, ALLERGY FREE WINTER!

Sincerely,

Chandra M Kumar MD

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