

HEALTH MATTERS

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Could You Be Suffering From Allergies?

By Dr. Dan Hambrook, West Bend Clinic Allergist



Many people with untreated allergy symptoms aren't aware of how much better they can feel once their symptoms are properly diagnosed and managed.

Hay fever or allergic rhinitis is an extremely common condition, affecting approximately 20% of the U.S. population.

Allergic rhinitis is caused by allergens in the air, which are usually harmless but can cause problems in certain people. Ironically, it is the human body's ability to maintain constant readiness against invaders that makes millions of people susceptible to allergies. When allergic rhinitis is caused by outdoor allergens such as tree, grass and weed pollen, it is called seasonal allergic rhinitis or "hay fever." When caused by indoor allergens from pets, mold, dust mites and cockroach droppings, it's called perennial allergic rhinitis. You can have either seasonal or perennial allergic rhinitis, or a combination of both.

Characteristics of allergic rhinitis include sneezing, runny and stuffy nose, itching, and itchy, red, and watery eyes. Allergies are also associated with ear infections, sinus infections, nasal polyps, and allergic skin rashes. While allergic rhinitis itself is not life threatening (unless accompanied by severe asthma or food/medication/

stinging insect allergies), the effect on an individual's quality of life can be significant.

Allergies significantly impair quality of life and affects both school and work performance. In one year in the U.S., there are a staggering 811,000 missed workdays, 4.23 million reduced-productivity days, and 824,000 school absences due to allergic rhinitis. The disease is under-diagnosed and often considered "normal" by patients, who do not perceive their symptoms as "out of the ordinary." Recognition of allergies is important and the disease can be appropriately managed only after it has been recognized, correctly evaluated, and diagnosed.

Diagnosis and Treatment of Allergic Rhinitis (Hay Fever)

An allergist can help determine which allergens, if any, are causing your symptoms. Allergy tests, combined with the knowledge of your allergy specialist to interpret them, can give precise information about what you are and are not allergic to. He or she will take a detailed health history, perform a physical exam and then test you for allergies. Skin tests show the results within 20 minutes.

These results, as well as how frequent and bad your symptoms are, will be considered when developing a treatment plan. Steps to manage your symptoms may include avoiding the allergens you are allergic to, medications and/or allergy shots (immunotherapy).

Allergy Shots

If you have allergies, you may be wondering if allergy shots are the best treatment for you. Allergy shots are aimed at increasing your tolerance to allergens that trigger your symptoms every time you are exposed to them. An allergist is the most qualified physician to test which allergy you have and tell you if allergy shots are right for you.

Allergy shots may be considered if your symptoms are constant, if you don't want to take medications or feel that they are not enough, or if you want long-term control of your allergies with less need for medications. According to expert guidelines, allergen injection therapy should be considered for individuals who continue to have moderate-to-severe symptoms despite therapy, or who have coexisting conditions such as sinus disease, asthma, or both. This treatment involves receiving injections periodically over a period of three to five years. The end result is decreased sensitivity to allergens. Allergy injection therapy may also confer long-term benefits. It is the only intervention for allergies that can fundamentally alter the underlying cause of disease and thus alter the natural history.

If you would like to learn more, think you may be suffering from allergies, or to schedule an appointment, please call 262-334-3451 or visit westbendclinic.com.

Treatment Options for Arthritic Diseases vary for each patient

By Dr. Rafal Ryzka, West Bend Clinic Rheumatologist



Treatments for rheumatic (arthritic) diseases include both non-pharmaceutical and pharmaceutical options. Treatment plans are developed to help the patient maintain their lifestyle.

Treatment plans usually combine several types of treatment and vary depending on the rheumatic conditions. Plans can also be modified /changed depending on the patient's response to the treatment. Rheumatic diseases can include, but are not limited to osteoarthritis (wear and tear arthritis), rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, ankylosing spondylitis, and Sjogren's Syndrome.

Non-Pharmaceutical Treatment Options

Treating rheumatic diseases without the use of prescription drugs includes different options such as proper physical activity and diet. Those often tend to be overlooked as sometimes patients think "only medications can really help." However these options can prove to be very successful.

Physical activity is an important part of the treatment for rheumatic diseases. Patients should develop a comfortable balance between rest and activity, and pay attention to "signals" from their bodies.

When one is experiencing pain or fatigue, it is important to take a break and rest, however too much rest may cause muscles to become weak and joints to become stiff. People with rheumatic disease generally can participate in a variety of exercise programs. Good options include aerobic activity like walking, bicycle riding and water exercises. Patients may benefit from sessions of physical, occupational, and massage therapy. Hot and cold therapies can also be used to reduce the pain and inflammation of arthritis.

Another important part of a treatment program is a well-balanced diet. This helps manage body weight and stay healthy. Nutritional supplements may also be helpful for relieving musculoskeletal symptoms.

Medication Options for Treatment

A variety of medications are used to treat rheumatic diseases, depending on the rheumatic disease and the individual. The medications used to treat most rheumatic diseases do not provide a cure, but rather limit the symptoms of the disease.

In some cases, especially when a person has rheumatoid arthritis or another type of inflammatory arthritis, the medication(s) may slow the course of the disease and prevent further progression.

Surgery Options

In some cases, surgery may be required to repair damage to a joint after injury or to restore function or relieve pain in a joint damaged by arthritis. The decision about the specific surgery is made by a surgeon after thorough discussion of potential benefits and risks with the patients.

While this lists several treatment options for rheumatic diseases, this is by no means covers them all. The best treatment option is made after a thorough assessment of each patient's individual needs by a doctor. The goal is always to help each patient get back to an active, healthy and happy lifestyle.

If you would like to learn more, or think you may be suffering from a rheumatic disease, or to schedule an appointment, please call 262-334-3451 or visit westbendclinic.com.

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