

World Asthma Day – May 3rd, 2016

Food Allergy Awareness Week - May 15 to 21st, 2016



May heralds a number of health days dedicated to Asthma and Allergy. You may wonder what allergies and asthma have in common. A lot as it turns out. Allergies and Asthma often occur together. The same substances that trigger your allergy symptoms, such as pollen and foods, may also cause asthma symptoms.

Asthma and Food Allergy are chronic illnesses and may require long-term management. For many children and families adjustment to the condition may result in periods of uncertainty and worry. It is important to have up to date management plans together with developmentally appropriate education to assist in balancing food allergy or asthma management with participation in every day activities.

Asthma

Asthma is a disease of the airways and a person who has asthma may find it more difficult to breathe in and out at times, whilst at other times breathing normally. People with asthma have sensitive airways which react to triggers (viruses, pollens, foods), causing the muscles around the airways to tighten and squeeze, the airways to swell and produce more mucus.

Asthma is usually managed with effective clinical care, appropriate medications and by following an asthma plan. However, asthma can be fatal. In 2014, asthma caused the deaths of 419 Australians. Older women were found to be most at risk of fatality from asthma in 2014.

Over 2 million Australians have asthma, which is about 1 in 10 adults and about 1 in 9 children.

How to recognise asthma:

Symptoms may vary from person to person, but common symptoms include:

- Breathlessness
- Wheezing
- A tight feeling in the chest
- Continuing cough

Good management of your asthma means taking control of your health, as it can be well controlled (with good knowledge, skills and medication) allowing you to just about anything you wish.

For more information

<http://www.nationalasthma.org.au>

Allergy

Allergy is an immune response that may be mild, moderate or severe (anaphylaxis). Anaphylaxis requires an immediate emergency response. People can be allergic to many things such as pollens, moulds, dust mite, animal dander or saliva, insect bites or stings, food, latex etc.

Allergic disease is common and appears to be currently increasing. Approximately, 20% of adults have hay fever, 10% of infants aged 12 months have a confirmed food allergy, 20% of infants have eczema and up to 3% of the population has a serious allergic reaction to insect stings (mainly adults). Allergy can affect quality of life and management is essential to decrease severity, avoid triggers and reduce risk.

Avoiding allergens can be quite challenging due to the prevalence of bulk-manufactured foods, labelling variations, cross-contamination of safe foods with allergens and the inclusion of food in social activities. This can be complicated by misunderstandings about the differences between food allergy and food intolerance and the amounts of food that can trigger an allergic reaction.

Anaphylaxis

Anaphylaxis is a sudden, severe allergic reaction that is potentially life threatening. It must be treated as a medical emergency, requiring immediate treatment and urgent medical attention. Anaphylaxis has signs

and symptoms indicating respiratory (breathing) or cardiovascular systems (heart and blood pressure) have been affected.

Symptoms of a mild to moderate allergic reaction:

- Tingling in the mouth
- Swelling of lips, eyes and face
- Hives, body rash, itching
- Vomiting and/or abdominal pain

Note: Abdominal pain/vomiting are signs of severe allergic reaction to insects.

Symptoms of a severe allergic reaction: ANAPHYLAXIS:

- Difficulty/noisy breathing
- Wheeze or persistent cough
- Swelling/tightness in throat
- Swelling of the throat
- Difficulty talking and/ or hoarse voice
- Pale and floppy (in young children)
- Distress/anxiety
- Loss of consciousness and/ or collapse.

Food allergy management can be time-consuming and promote uncertainty about food products. Dealing with allergies has been shown to affect multiple domains of a child and their family's life (Herbert, Shemesh & Bender, 2016¹). It is important to be aware that, at times, children may have the challenge of dealing with navigating social situations with dietary restrictions, or, may experience worry around food management.

For more information about allergy:

<https://www.allergyfacts.org.au/images/pdf/Lifethreatweb316.pdf>

¹ Herbert, L., Shemesh, E., Bender (2016). Clinical Management of Psychosocial Concerns Related to Food Allergy, *Journal of allergy and Clinical Immunology in Practice*. 4 (2), 205-213, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jaip.2015.10.016>