

MEDICAL BRIEFS

Pain relief

St. Mary Mercy Hospital in Livonia now offers a Spinal Disease Management Program for people suffering from back pain and discomfort from an injury. The SDM Program streamlines patient care through a team effort, which may include physical therapy, neurosurgery, anesthesiology, pain management, physician, primary care medicine, occupational therapy, neurology and psychology.

"By moving more quickly through the continuum of care, patients can achieve maximum benefit from the various treatment options," said Dr. Timothy Wright, medical director of the Pain Management Center.

For more information on the Spinal Disease Management Program, call Sarah Gilbert, director of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, St. Mary Mercy Hospital, (734) 655-8698. Patients must be referred by a primary care physician.

Arthritis lecture

Providence Hospital and Medical Center will present a lecture on arthritis 7-8:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 14 at Mission Health Medical Center, 37895 Seven Mile (at Newburgh) in Livonia.

Dr. David Markel, an orthopedic surgeon on staff at Providence Hospital, will discuss treatment options, pain management, current arthritis medicine and hip and knee replacement. To register, please call Providence Community Health at 1-877-346-5500.

Poison prevention

Children act fast... and so do poisons!

Each year, the state's certified regional poison control centers receive more than 100,000 total calls. Many of these calls could be avoided by following some simple precautions:

- Keep medicines in child-resistant containers.
- Never call medicine "candy."
- Store household cleaners, bug sprays, medicines, etc., out of the sight and reach of children.
- Put a product away immediately after using it.

Should a poisoning occur, call Michigan's poison control center at 1-800-POISON1 (1-800-704-7661). Depending on the poison, the center may recommend inducing vomiting using Syrup of Ipecac, taking the child to the emergency room, or taking other actions. It is extremely important to NEVER take ipecac syrup unless instructed to do so by a poison control center or a physician.

Ipecac syrup is an inexpensive plant extract available in pharmacies without a prescription. It should be kept in every home. When taken with water, it should produce vomiting. Activated charcoal is another poison antidote. This liquid binds to poisons and allows them to be excreted.

Ask your local pharmacist about poison prevention.

Clarification

The advanced hammer digit repair surgery discussed in the May 29th Observer article "Putting Your Best Foot Forward" is not a new procedure. It is a modification of a digital arthroplasty procedure performed for decades. The recent modification, made by Dr. John Mozana of Portland, Oregon, has been performed since 1995. The procedure is done on the medial side of the toe instead of the top.

Do you want your health news?

There are several ways you can reach the Observer Health & Fitness staff. The Sunday section provides numerous venues for you to offer newsworthy information including Medical Database (upcoming calendar events), Medical Newsmakers (appointments/new hires in the medical field), and Medical Briefs (medical advances, short news items from hospitals, physicians, companies).

We also welcome newsworthy ideas for health and fitness related stories. To submit an item to our newspaper you can call, write, fax or e-mail us.

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Aaaachoooo!



RANDALL MARTENS / STAFF ARTIST

One-third of Americans suffer from allergies

By RENEE SKOGLUND
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All Americans who suffer from hay fever and sinus problems sneezed at the same time, it would be the "aaaachoooo" heard around the world. According to a 1999 survey by the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, allergies affect about 33 percent of all Americans. That number is nothing new at all. Allergy experts thought the incidence of allergies was closer to 20 percent of the population.

More surprising, the survey results indicated that more than half of those who live in households with members who have allergies, including themselves, could not name any treatments other than prescription or over-the-counter medications.

"The new data shows us that allergies are almost twice as common as we thought," said Dr. Ira Finegold, past-president of ACAAI. "What's of even greater concern is that the majority of people with allergies don't know about treatment options, such as allergy shots, that can bring them relief. A lot of them are either suffering from the symptoms or from medication side-effects."

Based on this assumption, some people could experience a lifetime of allergy symptoms. Allergies are genetically predisposed, and — coupled with exposure to certain environmental conditions — can develop very early in life, said Dr. Rola Bokhari-Panza, a board-certified allergist with Allergy and Asthma Management in Novi.

"Seasonal allergies can start before two years of age. You need two seasons to become sensitized. But year-round allergies can show up within the first year."

Overactive immune system

Allergic rhinitis — known as hayfever (if seasonal) or perennial (if year-round) — has its origins in our immune systems. And some symptoms, like nasal congestion, produce their own set of sub-symptoms: mouth-breathing, snoring, and loss of taste and smell.

Symptoms occur when the body's immune system produces too much of the allergy antibody immunoglobulin E, or IgE, when exposed to allergens, such as pollens, molds, dust mites and pet hair. The allergens bind to the antibodies, which are attached to cells that produce histamine and other allergy symptom-causing chemicals.

The antibodies act as the red button of these "allergy bomb" cells. Press the button and the bombs explode, releasing the histamine and chemicals into the air. The result: itchy eyes, throat and nose; congestion, postnasal drip, coughing; wheezing; and fatigue.

Fatigue is a significant symptom, say allergists. Over-the-counter medications can make you drowsy, and the coughing and sneezing just plain tires you out. In addition, the inflammation caused by the

Prescription medications contain a newer generation of antihistamines and produce fewer side effects.

overproduction of mucus makes allergy sufferers more prone to viral and sinus infections.

It's not the pollen people are allergic to, but rather the allergenic protein present in the pollen grains themselves. When the pollen gets wet, the proteins are released into the atmosphere. Some of these pollens are more lethal than others, such as those from the grass family, ragweeds, and the birch and oak trees.

Allergenic plant proteins also may reside in plants humans eat. For example, if you're allergic to plant protein inside of ragweed pollen and that protein is present in plant foods such as banana, watermelon and cantaloupe, then you may experience allergy symptoms after eating these foods. The roof of your mouth may itch, your lips swell, and your throat may begin to close.

Typical allergy symptoms range from mild to severe. Just how severe?

"Imagine yourself having a really, really severe cold for several weeks. You're mouth-breathing, sneezing and sneezing. You feel really terrible," said Bokhari-Panza.

For allergy specialists, it's always one big allergy season. Their calendar is defined by indoor and outdoor allergies. Indoor allergies last year-round, with the most guilty allergens being dust mites and furry pets. Outdoor allergies occur when plant life decides to reproduce by releasing billions of "plant sperm" into the air in the form of pollen.

Unfortunately, many people endure both indoor year-round and outdoor seasonal allergies, said Bokhari-Panza.

Treatment

Allergists recommend avoidance as the first line of defense:

- Keep windows closed at home and in your car.
- Use air-conditioning and a dehumidifier.
- Shower or bathe and change clothes following outdoor activity.

■ Don't hang clothes out to dry; instead, dry them in a clothes dryer.

■ Have a friend or family member do your yard work.

There are also several medications, both over-the-counter and prescription. However, most over-the-counter medications contain first-generation antihistamines, which effectively relieve allergy symptoms but also can cause drowsiness, dryness of the mouth and eyes, blurred vision and even constipation and urinary retention.

tion and urinary retention. Prescription medications contain a newer generation of antihistamines and produce fewer side effects. Your doctor or allergist can prescribe the most effective medication for your particular allergy.

However, if avoidance techniques and medications do not work, or if the medication causes too many side effects, or if your allergies are year-round, it's time to consider allergy shots — also known as immunotherapy or allergy vaccinations. Immunotherapy is strongly recommended for people with severe allergies to insect stings.

Allergy shots

Allergy shots work differently than medications, which control the symptoms rather than cure the problem. "Shots boost up the immune system so you become more tolerant," said Bokhari-Panza.

An allergy diagnosis is based on detailed medical history and physical examination, most likely by a certified allergy/immunology specialist. Although blood tests can determine the increased risks of developing allergy symptoms, allergy skin tests are most definitive. They detect the causes of the allergic reaction and consequent symptoms.

"Skin tests are the most accurate and most cost-effective manner of determining allergies," said Bokhari-Panza.

The shots are given once or twice a week over three to five years until the patient reaches a maintenance dose. After that, they're given once every four weeks. According to the ACAAI, "they're the closest thing we have to a cure," said Bokhari-Panza. "Even after they stop the shots, the majority of people will do fine for years."

According to the ACAAI, immunotherapy is successful in up to 90 percent of patients with seasonal allergies and up to 80 percent of patients with year-round allergies. "Undergoing immunotherapy is a big decision requiring a long-term commitment," said Dr. David Bernstein, vice chairman of the ACAAI's committee on immunotherapy. "However, it is still the best treatment available to control and prevent symptoms or to reduce needs for daily medications."

The ACAAI survey indicated that people perceived vaccination as a great treatment for allergies but was not affordable.

"In fact, allergy shots often are covered by health plans and the treatment can eliminate the need to buy medications," said Finegold. "Overall, it's often less expensive and more effective than relying on medications every day and trying to isolate the allergy-sufferer from the environment. In many cases, the shots eventually can be discontinued, along with allergy medications, and the immunity maintained."

When it comes to allergies, take Bokhari-Panza's advice: "Why suffer if you can get better?"

Source: Allnet

Internet monitoring offers asthma sufferers a safety net

For most people, the spring and summer months mean blossoming trees and more time outdoors. But for the approximately 17 million Americans who are affected by asthma, the seasons have a different meaning.

This is because people who suffer from asthma know that high pollen count and the increased physical activity can result in severe asthma attacks, making it difficult for them to enjoy the season.

For individuals suffering from asthma, proper monitoring is the key to warding off an attack.

Now there is a new way to monitor asthma through the Internet, thanks to LifeChart.com. Through LifeChart.com, patients and their physicians have daily access to secure, personalized lung function data.

By monitoring their conditions regularly with the LifeChart.com service, reviewing an electronic health report and correlating these results to regular activities, patients and their doctors can help up-to-date information for:

- Identifying triggers that can cause an asthma attack.
- Determining if asthma medications are working.
- Evaluating an overall asthma management plan.

The National Institutes of Health recommends that patients monitor their asthma and take action when symptoms appear; identify early warnings that the attack is worsening, and

adjust medication to get the lungs back to avoid severe asthma problems. That's how patients can benefit from using LifeChart.com with the Air-Watch Asthma Monitor.

The Air-Watch Asthma Monitor is a medical instrument about the size of a stopwatch that allows patients to obtain an objective measurement of how open their airways are. The patient breathes into the Air-Watch mouthpiece, and the device takes a measurement of how well the patient is breathing.

Once the test is taken, the patient can easily snap a standard phone line into the monitor, press a single button and transmit the results to LifeChart.com. Within seconds, the data are available for viewing on the patient's personalized LifeChart.com Internet page. With authorization from the patient, the data also can be automatically sent to the patient's healthcare team.

"The best thing an asthmatic patient can do is monitor his or her condition consistently," said Dr. Ric Malsch, of Academic Medicine Inc. in Kirkville, Mo. "I use LifeChart.com with my patients and have seen several instances where we were able to make adjustments in medications that would, in fact, ward off a trip to the emergency room."

For more information about monitoring asthma, visit www.LifeChart.com, or call the LifeChart Customer Service Line at (800) 287-0452.

Dear old Dad

The American Lung Association of Michigan has a great gift idea for Father's Day. How about a Gold Privilege Club membership book? For just \$38, the Golf Privilege Club allows golfers to play at nearly 170 courses throughout the state, and greens fees are free.

The selection is highlighted by northern resorts such as: The Natural, Wolverine, Shanty Creek, the three courses at the Grand Traverse Resort, McGuire's, Wilderness Valley, The Homestead and Dunmaglas. Local courses offering free greens fees include: New Hawthorne Valley, Indopence Green, Shady Hollow and Riverview Highlands.

Proceeds benefit the American Lung Association of Michigan. Membership is valid now through Oct. 31, 2000. Cart fees are required at most venues. Call 1-800-LUNG-USA (800-588-4872).

