

Understanding Allergies Better ¹



TREATING ALLERGIES
THROUGH EDUCATION

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pharma *dynamics*

EFFECTIVE AFFORDABLE HEALTHCARE

Useful facts:

- Children with allergies often progress from one form of allergy to another (starting with eczema and food allergies and progressing to asthma and hayfever). **This is known as “the allergic march”.**
- **Lactose intolerance is NOT a food allergy!**
- Even though food allergies most commonly affect children between the ages of 1 and 3 years, **it can present for the first time in adults!**
- The commonest food allergies affecting South African children **include milk, egg and peanuts.**
- **About 10% of the population have urticaria (hives) at some time in their lives!**
- A single episode of urticaria (hives) often occurs as the result of a **viral infection**, NOT as the result of an allergy!
- **Urticaria** (hives) can occur from physical stimuli like cold, sweating and even light touch. Hives that occur from light touch are called **dermatographism** which means “skin-writing”.
- Urticaria (hives) can be successfully treated with higher than usual doses of the **non-sedating antihistamines.**
- **Fish that has been stored out of the fridge can cause hives through the collection of histamine in the fish meat itself! This is not an allergy but a type of food poisoning.**
- Anaphylaxis can occur after the first known ingestion of a food.
- People with food allergy and at high risk of anaphylaxis must carry an **adrenaline autoinjector** with them at all time.
- **Eczema** is not primarily an allergy ... the underlying problem is a defect in the skin cells, and an allergy can later be obtained.
- **Aqueous cream should NOT** be used recurrently and left on the skin of patients with eczema as a “moisturiser” or an “emollient”. It is, however, a really good substitute for soap!

- Eczema never occurs over the bridge of the nose. The clear patch of skin in the middle of the face is called “the headlight sign”.
- Children with **very severe eczema** that doesn’t respond to maximal treatment with steroids and “moisturisers” **may have food allergies**. Food allergies very rarely are involved in people with milder eczema.
- Allergic rhinitis is divided into an intermittent form (hayfever) lasting less than 4 weeks or 4 days a week and a persistent form lasting more than 4 days a week for more than 4 weeks. This is often referred to as “sinus”, but is actually “**persistent allergic rhinitis**”.
- The onset of persistent allergic rhinitis is slow, so many patients don’t even realise they have allergic rhinitis until it is pointed out to them, even if it is very severe and affecting their quality of life.
- The rubbing of the nose in allergic rhinitis is called “the allergic salute”.
- Many people with allergic rhinitis (hayfever) also have eye signs (conjunctivitis). This overlap is most marked with the intermittent form of allergic rhinitis.
- People with allergic rhinitis are at **increased risk of asthma, sinusitis, sore throats, Middle ear infections, sleep problems**, and many sorts of behavioural, educational and emotional problems.
- **Allergy immunotherapy (drops under the tongue, or injections) is very effective for people with severe allergic rhinitis, especially if they are sensitive to one major allergen!**
- **Severe bee venom allergy can be almost “cured” with allergy immunotherapy injection!**
- It is difficult to prevent allergies, but some strategies have been shown to be useful. Avoid cigarette smoke during pregnancy and after birth. Pregnant mothers should eat lots of oily fish, as well as fruit and vegetables. **Pregnant moms must NOT avoid any specific allergenic foods either during pregnancy or breastfeeding.** Solids should be introduced from 4-6 months and all solids introduced by about 1 year of age. Eczema must be treated really well to prevent food allergy. Mothers who are completely unable to breastfeed and who have a history of allergies in the immediate family may choose to give their children “**partially or extensively hydrolysed**” formula milk, instead of a normal infant formula.