



Taking care of your child's allergies

By Cecelia Damask, DO

Your child has been diagnosed with allergic rhinitis, an overactive response to something in the environment. The symptoms are fairly simple — a runny nose (rhinitis), watery eyes, and some sneezing. The best solution is to administer an over-the-counter antihistamine, and the problem will resolve on its own. Right?

Not really. The interrelated structures of the ears, nose, and throat can cause certain medical problems that trigger additional disorders — all with the possibility of serious consequences.

Simple allergies can lead to long-term problems in swallowing, sleeping, hearing, and breathing.

Let's see what else can happen to a child with untreated allergies:

Ear infections

One of the most common medical problems in children is recurrent ear infections (otitis media). These infections are not only common in early childhood, they are even more common when children suffer from allergies as well. Allergic inflammation can cause swelling in the nose and around the opening of the Eustachian tube (ear canal) that has the potential to interfere with drainage of the ear.

Sore throats

The allergens may cause the formation of excess mucus that can make the nose run or drip down the back of the throat. Commonly called post-nasal drip, this can lead to cough, sore throats, and husky voice. Dry mucus can also irritate the throat and be hard to clear. Air conditioning and dehydration can aggravate the condition, as will antihistamines.

Snoring

Chronic nasal obstruction is a frequent symptom of allergies. The lining inside the nose becomes swollen, obstructing the flow of air through the nose. This inflammation can cause chronic nasal obstruction that affects individuals during the day and night. Nasal congestion can also contribute to headaches and sleep disorders such as snoring and obstructive sleep apnea; this happens because the nasal airway, the normal breathing route, is blocked during sleep.

Pediatric sinusitis

Allergies can cause enough inflammation and swelling to obstruct the openings to the sinuses. Consequently, a bacterial sinus infection occurs. In the case of acute sinusitis, children will often have pain combined with a fever and a purulent (pus-like) nasal discharge. Sometimes pain and fever are not evident. Some children may have mood or behavior changes. Most will have a purulent, runny nose and nasal congestion even to the

point where they must mouth breathe. The infected sinus drains around the Eustachian tube, and therefore many of the children will also have a middle ear infection.

What causes allergies in children?

Allergic rhinitis typically results from two conditions: family history/genetic predisposition to allergic disease and exposure to allergens. Allergens are substances that produce an allergic response. Children are not born with allergies. They develop symptoms upon repeated exposure to environmental allergens. The number of patients with allergies has increased in the past decade, especially in urban areas.

When should my child see a doctor?

If your child's cold-like symptoms (sneezing and runny nose) persist for more than two weeks, it is appropriate to see your doctor. If your child suffers with severe symptoms or symptoms year-round, it is appropriate to see an ear, nose, and throat physician. An examination by a specialist will assist in preventing other ear, nose, and throat problems from occurring. Special tests can be done to determine what is triggering your child's symptoms. The specialist may recommend treatment of your child's allergies to stop the sneezing, wheezing, coughing, and scratching. This may be accomplished with immunotherapy, which involves injections in the specialist's office or drops (no shots!!) that you place under your child's tongue at home.

Dr. Damask is a board-certified otolaryngologist, a physician who practices the medical management of diseases of the ears, nose, and throat. Her specialty is in the treatment of allergies. Dr. Damask attended medical school in Chicago, and was in private practice in North Carolina prior to opening Lake Mary Ear, Nose, Throat & Allergy.

LM

Why do ears itch?

An itchy ear can be a maddening symptom. Sometimes it is caused by a fungus or allergy, but more often it is from chronic dermatitis (skin inflammation) of the ear canal. One type is seborrheic dermatitis, a condition similar to dandruff in the scalp; the skin is dry, flaky, thickened, and inflamed (irritated). This may be aggravated by certain food groups. Some patients with this problem will do well to decrease their intake of foods that aggravate it, such as greasy foods, carbohydrates (sugar and starches), and chocolate.

An otolaryngologist treats allergies and will often prescribe a steroid-containing eardrop, cream, or ointment that may help the problem. There is no long-term cure, but it can be kept under control.