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**Air It Out – Electronic Version. Vol. 14, Issue 8, #2 August 2007**

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**NEWS AND VIEWS ON ASTHMA AND ALLERGIES**

\* A recent controversial study published in the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology found that infants living in homes with multiple dogs may be less likely to develop allergies or asthma later in life. The study found these tots were less likely to have wheezing which often leads to allergies and asthma. BUT there was also a high prevalence of a specific bacterial substance, or endotoxin, in these same homes. Physicians know our bodies first develop allergic reactions when we're very young and perhaps the presence of high levels of indoor endotoxins might modify the immune systems and block the development of allergies. This is a limited study and is not a recommendation for those at risk of allergies or asthma to introduce dogs into the household.

\* Scientists have long recognized the benefits to adult heart-health of taking an aspirin a day. Taking an aspirin at the first sign of a heart attack or stroke might mean the difference between survival or not. A recent study showed men taking an **aspirin** every other day also reduced their chance of developing adult onset asthma. This may have something to do with the anti-inflammatory aspects of aspirin, but the jury is still out as recommending this treatment for all.

\* Foam, synthetic, feather or down, a new study from England (North West Lung Center at Wythenshawn Hospital in Manchester) discovered that **ALL pillows are breeding grounds for fungus**. We're sleeping on miniature ecosystems, not good for our health. We all slough off dead skin cells, the main food source for dust mites and dust mite feces is a major source of nitrogen and food for certain species of fungus that can thrive in pillows. The most common fungus discovered in synthetic pillows was *Aspergillus fumigatus* which causes an unhealthy condition in lungs and sinuses and can spread to the brain or other organs. This condition is difficult to treat and is a leading cause of death in leukemia and bone marrow transplant patients or in others with compromised immune systems. The best way to eliminate this potentially dangerous health threat: **replace pillows frequently** but most importantly, use a good pillow **encasement** so as not to breathe in these spores.

\* For children under the age of puberty, when it comes to developing asthma gender makes no difference in who might develop asthma, but once puberty begins, **more girls than boys develop asthma** and **more women than men develop adult onset asthma**. Many physicians believe **this difference is largely due to sexual hormones**. **Other factors also contribute** to a higher rate of asthma in girls after puberty: obesity, depression and smoking, all more prevalent in adolescent girls. Among teens, more girls than boys smoke. We can't change the physical variance of sexual hormones, but we can control other factors. Maintain a healthy diet, get regular exercise, develop positive outside interests and hobbies and maintain strong relationships with friends and family to help eliminate depression and **DON'T smoke**.

\* If you're part of the 20% of the population that gets **hives** occasionally or someone who suffers with **atopic dermatitis**, you don't have to suffer with these allergic conditions. Hives **are often caused by allergic reactions** to food, medications, viral infections or external factors. For adults, **reactions to medications** like aspirin, ibuprofen, high-blood pressure meds or codeine-based pain-killers are most often responsible for causing hives. The **most common food related reactions for adults** are to nuts, eggs, shellfish, soy, wheat and milk. **Children most often get hives from reactions to food allergies or to viral infections** like colds. Hives can be treated with antihistamines, the gold-standard, and dermatitis can be treated with products to control the itching and decrease the inflammation. If you have hives or any dermatitis, **DON'T scratch** or rub – that makes it worse; avoid foods which could have caused the breakout; take cool not hot baths or showers; apply cool compresses to the rash; wear loose clothing; avoid sun. Ask your physician for the best treatment for your skin allergy and don't forget the sunscreen even on overcast days.

\* **Hay Fever** season (spring, summer, fall) results in allergic reactions to airborne pollens from trees, grasses, flowers, weeds, plants and mold causing **seasonal rhinitis** - runny nose, congestion, itching eyes, hoarseness, sneezing and for many, fatigue, irritability and a general feeling of not being well. The best way to control your Hay Fever is to avoid the allergens. In Texas that's very difficult. Trees are the earliest pollen-producers and these trees remain active into November in TX. **Tree pollen** is so light that winds can carry these pollens many miles from their source. Of the more than 50,000 types of trees, less than 100 types contribute pollen – and most of them are native to Texas. Trees have a gender: it's the **male trees that produce the most pollen**. Female ash, box elder, cottonwood, date palm, red maple, silver maple, poplar and willow trees are **completely pollen-free**. If you're planting trees, add those or others that are **fairly allergen-free**: crepe myrtle, dogwood, fig, fir, palm, pear, plum, rosebud or redwood. **Grass pollen** is a major contributor to hay fever, too. The worst grass pollen varieties are Bermuda, Johnson grass, Kentucky bluegrass, Orchard grass, Sweet vernal grass and Timothy grass – all prevalent in Texas. It helps to keep your grass mowed short and if possible, replace the offending grass with ground covers like Irish moss, bunch and dichondra. Stone works too!

**Upcoming Free AAFA-TX Programs: 1) Sat. Oct. 13**, "Diagnosing & Managing Asthma: Successful Asthma Control for Kids & Adults" Wm. Lumry, MD, Robert Rogers, MD, Eric Schmitt, MD, William Neaville, MD instructors, Richard Herrscher, MD Moderator. Rebecca Gruchalla, MD, PhD, Program Director. Presbyterian Hospital Dallas. A CME program worth 4 category 1 CME credits for physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants and nurses. **For more details, contact AAFA-TX. Pre-registration required.**

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