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Air It Out – Electronic Version. Vol. 14, Issue 12, #1 December 2007 HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

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ASTHMA: THERE'S BAD NEWS BUT THERE'S GOOD NEWS, TOO

* The Bad News? The **number of people afflicted with asthma continues to rise**. It is now the third leading cause of hospitalizations in the US (following pneumonia and physical injury). In Texas in 2005, 6.8% of the adult population and 6.2% of children under age 17 had asthma. Between 1999 and 2005, 1,831 Texans died of asthma complications. This is a worldwide problem with every nation reporting major increases in the incidence of asthma. Why are we seeing this drastic increase in asthma patients? To answer that question, scientists first **have to examine what causes asthma**.

* The Bad News? There is **no one cause**, there is no simple answer. Some believe asthma is a syndrome, signs and symptoms indicating characteristics of a disease. Many factors help determine why one person has asthma and another doesn't. One reason for asthma is genetic; some people have an inherited tendency to allergies and asthma.

* **Some scientists believe it may be triggered by the "hygiene hypothesis"** (refer to the November 2006 issue of Air It Out for more specifics). In order for our immune system to develop properly, it must be exposed to bacteria, viruses or other invaders to build up resistance, yet we sanitize everything with antibacterial cleaners; we use too many antibiotics when not needed, killing all bacteria, the good and the bad. But the hygiene hypothesis alone doesn't explain the immense growth in the number of asthma cases.

* **Some researchers connect the rise in obesity to the increase of asthma**. There *is* a connection between the two diseases. Sometimes weight gain, especially in girls and women, precedes asthma and those who are obese have more severe asthma symptoms. But this still doesn't explain the epidemic nature of asthma worldwide.

* **The most likely cause of the rapid asthma growth rate may be due to environmental factors**. What are these contributing factors? **1) Smoking**: Anyone who smokes and has asthma, or who is around a smoker, will have more severe symptoms and those who don't have asthma are at risk for developing asthma (and cancers) if they smoke or are around smokers. The message: stop smoking. Yes, it is difficult to stop, so it's best not to start. Nicotine is addictive. Most people can't stop "cold turkey" because of the addiction, but there are products to help you quit: gums, lozenges, skin patches or nasal sprays help some people. Eating an apple or other fruit before smoking a cigarette creates an unpleasant taste and helps some to quit. Others might try prescription antidepressant medication that's been used successfully by some. Support groups help others. Whatever means it takes stop smoking. **2) Air pollution**: we know dirty air makes asthma symptoms worse but it hasn't been proven that bad air quality will actually cause anyone to develop asthma. **3) Environmental allergens**: these are the substances which cause our immune system to react with an allergic reaction. The most common include animal dander, particularly cat dander; dust mites, mold and pollens. But again, *scientists don't feel that any of these allergens can cause asthma*, but they do cause symptoms in those with asthma. **So, if it's not 100% genetic, not caused by smoking, dirty air or cat dander, what is causing this increase in asthma? The answer is, no one knows for certain why this is a worldwide problem**. And, until scientists do determine the cause of this disease and prevent it, **the GOOD NEWS is, asthma can be controlled!**

* **YOU have the power to control your asthma**. See your healthcare provider for the *right diagnosis*. Discover what *environmental allergens* trigger your asthma symptoms and eliminate them in your world. Ask if *immunotherapy* is a good choice to help control your allergic reactions. *Don't smoke!* Pay attention to Ozone alerts and other "*bad air*" days and stay indoors on these days to reduce symptoms. *Clean-up your indoor air pollution*. Develop a medication plan with your healthcare provider that works for both of you, one you can follow, and then – *be in compliance*. **TAKE** your medication when and how you are instructed to do so. *Exercise and eat a healthy diet* rich in anti-oxidants, omega-3 fatty acids, fiber and yogurt to maintain a healthy weight and a strong immune system. Develop strong friendships and family interests and learn to reduce the stress in your life so you can *sleep well*. See your physician regularly to assess your asthma control. **You can control asthma!** For more information, contact AAFA-TX or see our website www.aafatexas.org

With Gratitude and Thanks! The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, Texas serves Texans with free programs and services. We can do this due to the generous support from corporate education grants from Novartis Pharmaceuticals, Merck Pharmaceuticals, Verus Pharmaceuticals, Genentech, GlaxoSmithKline, and Schering Plough; foundation grants including The Hillcrest Foundation, William & Catherine Bryce Memorial Fund, The Adeline & George McQueen Foundation, The Windham-Bartlett Foundation, The Lumry Family Foundation, The Prairieland Foundation; EPA & Aventis program stipends; community-sponsored fundraisers in our name; professional memberships; Tributes and Memorials to loved ones; individual, civic and corporate donations such as that from Colonial Country Club and the Nokia Golf Tournament. 93 cents of every dollar donated supports our free programs and services. To all these supporters we offer our gratitude and thanks! **We need your support**. Ask how you can help AAFA-TX provide services and programs free to the community. We are a 501 c 3 organization: contributions and grants may be tax deductible.

Upcoming Free AAFA-TX Programs: **1) Tues. Jan. 8**, 9 am-noon, "Asthma Management & Education" a CE program for nurses and respiratory therapists worth 3 contact hrs, Hanna HS, Price Rd., Brownsville. **2) Fri. Feb. 29**, 9 am-noon, "Asthma Management & Education" a CE program for nurses and respiratory therapists worth 3 contact hrs, Lake Highland HS, Richardson. **3) Fri. Feb. 29**, 1-3 pm, "The Recognition & Treatment of Anaphylaxis" a CE program for nurses worth 2 contact hrs, Lake Highland HS, Richardson, Dr. Eric Schmitt, instructor. Pre-registration required for programs. For more information, contact AAFA-TX.

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