

WHY DO I HAVE ALLERGIES?

Approximately one million children and adults in the Dallas/Ft. Worth Metroplex suffer from allergic diseases, thieves of time, money and quality of life. Approximately 26.9% of the population in Texas is affected by allergies. A 2007 poll listed Dallas/Ft. Worth as 2nd, San Antonio 4th, El Paso 13th, Austin 24th, McAllen 25th and Houston 28th in the top worst 100 cities to live if you have Spring allergies. What are allergies and why are some adults and children affected by them when others aren't?

Allergy occurs when our immune system mistakenly fights harmless substances including pollens, mites, mold spores and animal dander (skin flakes), all of these particles **totally, absolutely harmless**. Our immune system is designed to fight viruses and bacteria that can make us sick. Our immune system shouldn't fight allergens (pollens, mites, molds and dander) because they are harmless. But those with allergies simply make a mistake and their immune systems fight allergens and the chemicals, histamines, released to fight the allergens, are what cause our allergy symptoms to occur.

According to **Dr. Robert Rogers, MD**, of Ft. Worth Allergy & Asthma Associates and a founding Board member of the Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America, Texas Chapter, "it helps to understand how this 'allergy fight' occurs if you think of the eyes, nose and bronchial tubes as being lined with millions of tiny water balloons. The 'balloons' are actually cells called mast cells; everyone has them, allergic or not. These balloon-like cells are filled with chemicals, not water. When you inhale allergen particles, they should simply bump into the balloons, but the balloons should not pop. If the balloons don't pop, you don't have an allergic reaction. Non-allergic people never pop balloons when they inhale allergens". Unfortunately, an allergic person's immune system MISTAKENLY thinks the allergens are harmful, and responds by producing antibodies to fight the allergens. These allergic antibodies are able to attach to the balloons lining the eyes and the respiratory tract to "look for" the allergens. When an allergen gets into the eyes, nose, or bronchial tubes, the allergic antibody detects the allergen and triggers the balloon to pop, releasing chemicals to fight the allergen.

Dr. Rogers further explains "it is the chemicals released from the balloons that irritate the bronchial tubes. It may help to imagine the allergic antibody as a straight pin, with its point at the surface of the balloon. The pin pops the balloon whenever an allergen is in the eyes, nose or bronchial tubes. So allergic people are able to make 'pins' with their immune system, but non-allergic people cannot. We will be able to cure allergy when we figure out how to get rid of the pins."

While we wait for a cure, what can be done to control allergy? Dr. Rogers feels there are three basic options for allergy control:

- Avoid exposure to the allergen particles
- Take medicines to reduce irritation caused by the chemicals from the balloons
- Use allergy shots to change the immune response to the allergens

If you are one of those "robbed" of your quality of life by these allergic reactions, the Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America, Texas, can help you. AAFA-TX offers a toll-free hotline, educational materials, programs and services for patients, caregivers and the community. For more information, email info@aafatexas.org



Asthma and Allergy
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