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ASTHMA & ALLERGIES: DID YOU KNOW...?

* ... **asthmatics who breathe** air containing **coarse particulate matter** (road & construction dust, etc) may be **exposing** themselves to **heart problems** according to a recent study by the University of N. Carolina Center for Environmental Medicine. For asthmatics, even breathing a small amount of these particles found in poor quality outdoor air can increase their bad cholesterol levels and increase inflammation-linked white blood cells. What can you do to protect yourself? If you're **asthmatic or have heart problems, stay indoors on bad air days and wear protective masks if you must go out**. The number of bad air days is increasing due to Global Warming: help our planet by going "Green" when possible.

*... one of three university athletes has **exercise-induced asthma, or EIA**. A recent study conducted at the Ohio State University Asthma Center said these athletes may have no prior history of asthma. EIA usually occurs 5 to 20 minutes after intense physical exertion with symptoms like shortness of breath, chest pain, wheezing, chest tightness or coughing. Approximately **one in ten people with no history of asthma can experience EIA**, and neither gender nor sport made any difference in testing positive for EIA. Often **EIA in competitive athletes is misdiagnosed** because the symptoms vary so widely. Researchers stressed the need to develop routine asthma diagnosis and management standards for competitive athletes.

*... the number of **medication allergies** is **rising**, and if a patient with a drug allergy is admitted to hospital and is unconscious or otherwise unable to share drug allergy information to the admitting nurse, this omission could be fatal. Even if an allergy is in the patient's personal medical records there is no way (yet) the hospital can tap into those records in an emergency. A 2003 report from the Royal College of Physicians found up to 15% of inpatients have a longer hospital stay than expected due to undeclared drug allergy. Empower yourself in any potential emergency by wearing a medical alert bracelet or necklace. Examples can be found online, including those on www.IdentifyYourself.com/AAFATX

*... some adults who have **chronic bronchitis** and are **smokers may have or develop COPD** or Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. Chronic bronchitis in a smoker (or past smoker) may be one of the earliest signs of COPD, an irreversible disease where there is inflammation in the small airways with airflow obstruction, shortness of breath, a chronic cough and lots of phlegm. What can you do to **help prevent COPD**, an adult disease? **If you smoke, stop**. If you don't smoke, **don't start**. **Second-hand smoke** is just as dangerous so never expose your children or self to tobacco smoke.

* ...the beach phenomenon known as "**Red Tide**," found seasonally along the Gulf coast of Florida, is actually **blooms of an ocean organism that produces potent toxins**. A healthy person who inhales these toxins may have eye irritation, rhinitis, wheezing and a non-productive cough which usually disappears an hour after leaving the beach. These toxins affect asthma patients to a greater degree. **Asthmatics** exposed to the toxins for just an hour experienced **respiratory problems** and decreased lung function. If you live in Florida or plan a vacation there and are asthmatic, be alert for "Red Tide" invasions and stay off the affected beaches.

* ... the number of persons experiencing **allergic rhinitis** worldwide **is rising**, perhaps due to an increase in *poor outdoor air quality* due to Global Warming plus an increase of *poor indoor air quality* due to our use of volatile compounds and chemical irritants in building materials and home furnishings. The quality of life for someone with chronic rhinitis is reduced. Adults who have it can experience mood swings, be less efficient at work and suffer from sleep apnea that can leave them exhausted the next day. If you have allergic rhinitis, *identify your allergens and then either eliminate them or avoid them* in your personal environment. *Stay indoors on bad air days. Reduce dependency on chemical products* contributing to poor indoor air quality – chemical cleaning products, caustic chemicals, room sprays, scented candles, etc. Help reduce poor outdoor air quality by reducing your vehicle use and keeping the engines tuned. Planting pollen-free trees and plants and shrubs which act as natural air purifiers helps also.

* ... if you have red or puffy skin on parts of your body, you might have an allergic skin condition called **angiodema** which is swelling in the deeper layers of the skin and often occurs along with hives. Angiodema usually occurs in the soft tissue of the body – the eyelids, mouth or genital area and can be chronic or acute. Like hives, they are an allergic reaction of histamines but in deep tissue, not surface skin. **Allergen triggers for this skin condition** can include medications like aspirin, NSAIDS (Ibuprofen, Aleve, etc), beta blockers or pain killers including codeine; certain foods including nuts, eggs, shellfish, soy, wheat and milk and, in children, a viral infection like a cold can trigger this skin condition. The most common treatments are, of course, to avoid the allergen, but symptom relief often comes from antihistamines. Avoid scratching or rubbing which can spread the rash. Take cool showers, apply cool compresses and wear loose, light clothing when confronted with this skin condition. For more information on any of these topics, contact AAFA-TX.

Upcoming Free AAFA-TX Programs: **1) 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. **2) Fri. Feb. 29**, 1-3 pm, "**The Recognition & Treatment of Anaphylaxis**" a CE program for nurses worth 2 contact hours, Lake Highland HS, Richardson, Eric Schmitt, MD, instructor. Registration is complete. **3) New!** Academic scholarships are available for asthma students, details in February. For more information contact AAFA-TX.

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