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BITS AND PIECES

* There may come a day in the near future when those who suffer from **severe asthma** can **reduce the severity** of their disease, increase the number of symptom-free days and generally experience an improved quality of life **without taking more medications**. In fact, severe asthma patients would **REDUCE** medication intake if and when a **new minimally invasive surgical procedure** completes clinical trials successfully. The Cleveland Clinic believes that the new procedure, called **bronchial thermoplasty or BP**, is one of the top medical innovations of past years. Muscle tissue inside the bronchial tubes contracts (tightens) during an asthma flare-up or exacerbation, narrowing the airways and making it hard to breathe. With this BP surgical procedure, performed when the patient has no asthma symptoms, a thin flexible tube called a **bronchoscope** is passed down the windpipe into the lungs where it applies heat to the tissue in order to seal it and create a smooth wall of muscle in all the airways. This **reduces the airways' ability to constrict** or tighten up during a flare-up. BP is the **first non-drug treatment for asthma** and shows promise of reducing the need for medications and reducing the number and severity of symptoms. Watch for more information about this experimental procedure.

* "Here kitty, kitty" isn't what people with dander allergies should say. Cat dander is one of the most prevalent and potent allergens for many of the 150 million Americans with allergies. Most warm-blooded animals produce **dander** which is the microscopic dandruff-like saliva residue left on their coats or hair from licking. Since cats are in a constant "grooming" mode, their licking produces a lot of dander. We can't see dander, it's so fine, but it **becomes airborne** and then we inhale these tiny particles and have an allergic reaction. People with dander allergens are cautioned **NOT** to adopt a warm-blooded animal, especially cats, but who can resist? And if you already are owned by a cat it is almost impossible to part from them. Actually, you don't even need to live in the same house with a cat to be exposed to their dander since it's carried on the clothing of those who do live with cats and can be found in carpeting 6 months after a cat is removed. What can you do **to minimize the impact of a dander allergen**? 1) For some reason, neutered pets produce less dander, so have your pets spayed or neutered. 2) Keep cats (and dogs) out of the bedroom and try to keep them off furniture. 3) Use a HEPA vacuum at least weekly to pick-up as much pet hair and dander that sticks to it, as possible. 4) Pet hair acts as a magnet for outdoor pollens too, so keep cats indoors rather than letting them roam. 5) Ask your vet the best way to bathe your cat. Anyone who owns one knows cats and water don't mix so discuss the most appropriate method to bathe your cat, which helps reduce dander. Suggestion: use extreme caution when bathing cats. 6) Wash your hands thoroughly after handling your cat, and don't put your hands near your eyes, nose or mouth after playing with your cat.

* We all know one of the **basic rules of good health** is to **wash our hands frequently**. We know we must wash our hands after using the bathroom; we know we should wash our hands after working/playing outdoors; we know we should wash our hands before eating. But do you wash your hands after a trip to the grocery store? Do you wash hands after blowing your nose? After doing household chores, after attending a social/sport event or during and after plane trips? Our hands (and then face, hands, nose, mouth touched by our hands) are exposed to bacteria and allergens during all these activities. Keep some antibacterial hand wash in the car or purse for a quick clean-up but don't forget to wash your hands thoroughly with plain soap and hot water as soon as you can. More frequent 15 second long hand-washings will help to keep you and your family healthier.

* Looking for **non-medicinal methods to help** with your **sinusitis** symptoms? Many find relief in using their **neti pot**, a utensil that looks like a magic genie pot or a tea pot with a long narrow spout. The neti pot has been used in the Orient for many centuries to help unclog sinus passages. Using 1 cup of distilled slightly warm water, fill the pot and add ½ teaspoon baking soda and ½ teaspoon sea salt (it has less sodium than regular salt). Bend over a sink basin and gently pour water into one nasal cavity until it flows out the other cavity, then reverse. The process helps **clear sinus passages of the mucus** which can lead to infections. Neti pots can be found online or in some drugstores, but if this process sounds awkward, there are plastic squeeze bottle nasal irrigation kits, sold in drugstores, which do the same thing and are easier to use for some. **Always ask your healthcare provider** if this method might provide relief for your sinusitis.

* No surprise, a new study from Spain shows that using various **household spray products** not only causes asthma symptoms like wheezing, nasal irritation, inflammation and allergic reactions, but **may also trigger asthma itself** in some patients. Chemicals in common household products can present a serious health risk for much of the population with the biggest **health risk** coming from air fresheners, furniture polishes/cleaners and glass cleaners. To reduce your health risk, **eliminate or reduce your use of household cleaning spray products**, substitute natural products like vinegar & water for window cleaner, use paste wax to polish furniture and freshen the air with natural dried potpourris or, add a cinnamon stick and some orange or lemon peel to water and let it simmer on the stove for a few minutes for a fresh scent throughout the house. Not only will you help save our planet but your health will improve. Ask AAFA-TX for other natural cleaning hints.

* Having allergies might not be all bad. A recent study by the National Cancer Institute suggests that people with allergies are 40% less likely to suffer from brain cancer. Scientists believe **allergy patients' overactive immune systems suppress tumor growth**. For more information on allergies and asthma, refer to www.aafatexas.org or contact AAFA-TX.