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ASTHMA AND ALLERGY IN THE NEWS

* Have you heard about **vog**? It's not the latest video game but another form of **air pollution**, a smog cocktail of sulfur dioxide gas, dust and sunlight and it's affecting the Big Island of Hawaii. This sulfur dioxide stew is making people wheeze, causing headaches, raspy throat and killing plant life. When mixed with moisture in the atmosphere (humidity) it produces acid rain. What's responsible for this newest air pollutant? This time, it's Mother Nature. Kilauea volcano, which has been erupting regularly since 1983, blew a second vent this past spring so the volcano is now spitting out twice the volume of volcanic chemicals into the air, causing the vog. This gray haze of toxic air is **dangerous** to those who have **asthma or other respiratory problems**. There doesn't appear to be any relief in sight until the volcano stops erupting. If you have asthma and allergies and are planning a trip to Hawaii, you may want to skip the Big Island on your itinerary.

* According to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, we **Americans spent \$11 billion in 2005** on doctor bills, prescription drugs and other medical care **to relieve the allergy symptoms** of watery eyes, congestion, wheezing, coughing and headaches. By comparison, in 2000, we spent \$6 billion. This increase is caused partly because patients now pay out-of-pocket for allergy-related meds since many insurers no longer cover allergy related illness, partly because many drugs once covered by prescriptions are now OTC, partly due to inflation and mostly due to the **increase in the number of people who are suffering with allergies**. In 2002, 20% of Americans had a known allergy. In a 2005 report, **54% of all Americans** tested **positive** for one or more **allergens**. Almost **40% of all children have allergic rhinitis**, also known as Hay Fever, and allergic rhinitis along with asthma is the **number one cause for absenteeism**. In Texas, August through the first freeze is the worst time for Hay Fever sufferers. Is there anything that can help reduce both costs and symptoms? According to a 2007 study by the Nat'l Jewish Medical & Research Center in Denver, the **time of day we take medications** is important. Because hay fever symptoms (weepy eyes, runny nose, sneezing) are worse in the morning, we should **take our allergy medications at night** before bedtime so these meds will still be in our bloodstream in the morning and effective in controlling morning symptoms. To help remember to take meds, get in the habit of taking them when you do any regular nighttime chore like brushing your teeth or setting the alarm. **Medications can only help relieve your symptoms if you use them** – and using them at the right time helps more.

* According to AARP, almost 2/3 of adults over 50 are using complimentary and alternative medicine as part of their healthcare program – yet very few mention these **alternative meds** or treatments to their physicians and this can be dangerous. All herbs and vitamins can have potential side-effects or negative inter-actions with prescription or OTC medications. Why don't patients tell their physicians that they're taking vitamin supplements, herbal remedies, using acupuncture, massage therapy, meditation or naturopathy, all considered alternative medicine? The most common reasons are a) physicians don't ask b) patients didn't know they should discuss these treatments or medications with their physicians, and c) there isn't enough time during an office visit. Patients need to take control and **tell their physicians** they're **using alternative medication** or practices. By sharing, patients can really manage their own healthcare.

* Scientists are still trying to discover why the incidence of **childhood asthma is increasing** so drastically **worldwide**. Doctors at New York University discovered that there may be **a link between asthma and** a simple bacterium called **H. Pylori**. H. Pylori are common bacteria that thrive in our stomach. If left untreated H. Pylori bacteria causes peptic ulcers and stomach cancer. Forty years ago, perhaps 70-80% of Americans had this bacterium in their gut but now, due to better sanitation and antibiotics, the bug is only found in 20-30% of Americans. As a result of controlling this bacterium, we've seen a huge decrease in the number of people with peptic ulcers and stomach cancer. But now the New York study **links this decrease in H. Pylori bacteria to a rise in childhood asthma**. They believe this bug protects kids from getting asthma and allergies, not symptoms, but the disease. Much more research is necessary to confirm these conclusions and the implications they present to researchers for a cure for asthma.

* Physicians and patients both agree: **following an asthma medication plan** in order to control asthma symptoms **definitely improves the quality of life and asthma control**. Many patients aren't "in compliance" which means they're not using their medications as often or as prescribed and this usually means they experience more asthma flares, more hospital emergency room visits, more absenteeism and a poorer quality of life. The question is, **why aren't patients using their medications?** What role does the cost of asthma medications play in non-compliance? What role do higher co-pays play in non-compliance? What role does no insurance play? What role does lack of disease education play? Please send your experiences or comments on this topic to info@aafatexas.org. Your privacy is respected.

Upcoming AAFA-TX programs: **1) Sept. 2, 7-9 pm** Food Allergy Support Group open meeting, Montgomery County South Regional Library, 2101 Lake Robbins Dr. The Woodlands, 77380. For more information contact lorin@saferhouston.com **2) Oct. 3, 9-noon**, "Asthma Management & Education" a continuing ed. program worth 3 contact hours for nurses Oklahoma City, OK **3) Oct. 4**, "Asthma & Allergy Essentials for Childcare Providers" First Baptist Church of Melissa, Mudpies & Lullabies sponsor, Melissa, TX, Darla Theis, instructor **4) October 10** "Asthma & Allergy Essentials for Childcare Providers" Holy Family of Nazareth, Irving, Patty Carlton, instructor. **5) Oct. 13, 8:30 am-11:30 am** "Asthma Management & Education" a continuing ed. program worth 3 contact hours for nurses, Corpus Christi. **6) Nov. 8** "Walk for Food Allergy: Moving toward a Cure" Bob Woodruff Park, Plano, reg. begins 9 am. Sponsored by FAAN and partnered with AAFA-TX. **7) Nov. 19, 1:30-4:30 pm** "Asthma Management & Education" a continuing ed. program worth 3 contact hours for nurses, Albuquerque, NM. Pre-registration required for CE nursing programs. Contact info@aafatexas.org for more information.

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