

DMA

DEDHAM MEDICAL ASSOCIATES, INC.

Allergy & Immunology

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ASTHMA & THE "RULE OF TWO'S"

If you have asthma, you should understand one **important fact:** with the medical capabilities available today, asthma problems don't have to dominate your life.

With effective new medications that are available today, the inflammation that sets up your body for an asthma attack can usually be prevented in the first place, says DMA allergy specialist David Riester, MD. "Bronchial dilators are useful short-term tools for dealing with asthmatic episodes as they occur, but they don't treat the underlying problems," he says. "We look to prevent the attacks from occurring."

The "Rule of Two's" says that anyone who wheezes more than two times a week or two nights a month or uses more than two cans of bronchodilator a year should be on a preventive course of treatment with these new drugs.

"Asthma patients should be taking these long-term medications even when they feel well," Dr. Riester says. "With treatment to prevent the underlying inflammation, we can set our expectations high. Asthma patients really shouldn't be having trouble with asthma."

The primary mechanism of asthma is inflammation – most noticeably characterized by swelling – of tissues in the lungs. Inflammation can result from contact with "triggers" such as allergens like pollen, animal dander or dust mites; irritants like tobacco smoke and exhaust fumes, and sensitivity to some medications. But weather changes, physical exercise, viral and sinus infections, esophageal reflux disease and even emotional stress can also be triggers.

Inflamed, the tissues lining the bronchial tubes that form airways within your lungs become swollen, resulting in their narrowing and difficulty moving air into the lungs. The muscles surrounding your bronchi tighten, further constricting the airways, and a thick mucus is produced that makes passage of air even more difficult.

THE DMA ALLERGY TEAM

The Allergy Team at Dedham Medical Associates deals not just with asthma but with the full range of allergy issues, from allergic rhinitis (better known as year-round runny nose) to animal, dust mite, pollen, ragweed and peanut and other food allergies

Dr. Riester is certified in both Pediatrics and Allergy/Immunology. He and his staff work to test for allergy causes, implement treatments and counsel on life-style changes to minimize allergic reactions.

They work closely with patients and their primary care physicians to provide aggressive, preventive care with medications, lifestyle changes and other therapies.

Ask your physician whether it would be beneficial to have specialists working with him or her in managing your asthma or other allergy problems. To make an appointment with the DMA Allergy Team, call 781-329-1400, x1215.

The physical signs include difficulty breathing, wheezing, coughing and a feeling of tightness in your chest. Even if your asthmatic episodes tend to be mild, early treatment is desirable. Asthma that isn't dealt with over time can cause progressive loss of lung function as you age, developing into a serious problem. In some cases, asthma can result in death, even in children.

It's estimated that some 15 million Americans suffer from asthma, that more than 500,000 people are admitted to hospitals each year due to asthma problems and that more than 5,000 adults and children die from it.

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As outlined by National Institutes of Health guidelines, asthma management relies on a combination of approaches, including:

- **Regular monitoring of lung function by your physician**, using devices like peak flow meters and spirometers to measure its severity and changes due to treatment or progression
- **Efforts to control your environment** by reducing exposure to triggers
- **Medication for long-term management** to prevent airway inflammation, as well as short-term medications to treat attacks
- **Education to ensure a consistent, unified approach** for your asthma's management by you as the patient, your family and your health care providers

Environmental measures can range from simply seeking to avoid triggers such as cigarette smoke or pet dander to managing your exercise program appropriately to washing your bedding frequently and encasing your bed's mattress in an air-tight cover to control exposure to dust mites.

The best-known forms of medication have long-been the bronchodilators and corticosteroids designed to provide quick relief of symptoms during an asthma attack. Available as inhaled, oral or injectable medications, bronchodilators work to open up the bronchial tubes to allow better air flow. Short-term corticosteroids, provided in oral or injected forms, work to speed up the reduction of inflammation in the airways.

“More importantly for the long run, the new long-term medications are intended to prevent the risk of inflammation to begin with,” Dr. Riester says. “The most effective of these are new, inhaled corticosteroids that deliver medication directly to the airways and minimize side effects often associated with regular steroid use. Taken daily, these can substantially help patients avoid the risks of asthma attacks.”

He adds: **“It's important that these be taken on a daily basis**, even when everything seems fine. A proactive approach to maintenance is quite important. When properly followed, good asthma treatment can help patients lead active, normal lives.”

ALLEVIATING ALLERGIES

Whether for problems with air-borne substances such as pollen, mold or pet dander, for bee-sting sensitivity, for allergies to peanuts and other foods, or simply for allergic rhinitis (that is, year-round runny nose), the Allergy Team at Dedham Medical provides expert testing, diagnosis and medical and other treatments. Services include:

- **Testing and diagnosis** to determine the substances to which you are allergic, identifying the triggers that may cause a reaction

- **Education about lifestyle changes** that can reduce your exposure to allergens, whether avoidance of substances such as animal dander, encasing of bedding with airtight covers or guidance about lifestyle issues such as exercise (it's certainly possible for asthmatics when done with precautionary measures)

- **Medical treatment** with oral and nasal antihistamines, inhaled corticosteroids, decongestants and other agents to block allergy symptoms and inflammation

- **Allergen immunotherapy** (or “allergy shots”) to build up your tolerance to the substances to which you are allergic. By starting with a tiny amount of your allergen and gradually increasing the dosages in a series of injections over time, your body can build up a tolerance to the problematic agents.

“The field of allergy and immunology has made great strides,” Dr. Riester says. “There is much we can do for patients today that wasn't possible even a few years ago.”

Talk with your physician about whether it would be beneficial to have specialists working with him or her in managing your asthma or other allergy problem. To make an appointment with the DMA Allergy Team, call 781-329-4100, x1215.