

The Allergist

A newsletter from the Oklahoma Allergy & Asthma Clinic

Winter 2022



Claire E. Atkinson, M.D.

Exciting News about OAAC's Newest Allergist

OAAC congratulates Dr. Claire Atkinson, on her recent completion of her board exam. She is now board certified in Allergy and Immunology in addition to Pediatrics.

For her undergraduate studies, Dr. Atkinson attended the University of Tulsa and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree magna cum laude in psychology. She completed her medical degree at the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine, pediatric residency training at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. Dr. Atkinson finished her Allergy & Immunology fellowship training at the University of North Carolina.

Beginning in January 2023, she will be seeing patients at the Yukon satellite clinic in addition to the main office. Call today to get an appointment with Dr. Claire 405-235-0040!

Cedar Pollen is HERE!

One of the most important allergens during the winter is cedar pollen. High wind days in Oklahoma spread those pesky cedar tree pollens. Cedar allergy can sometimes cause a reaction known as cedar fever which can you make you feel as if you have a cold or the flu.

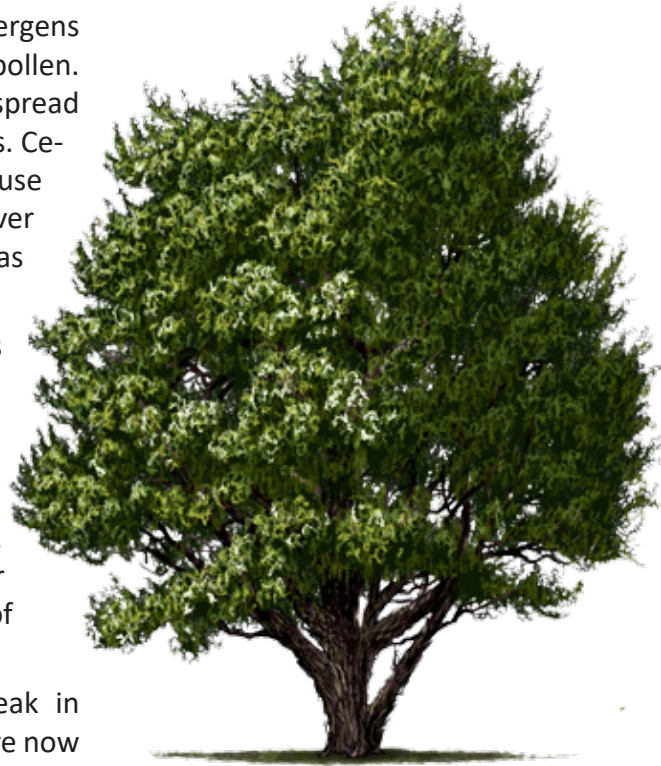
Cedar fever often effects people in the winter months when cedar is pollinating. The offending mountain cedar trees are common in Oklahoma, Missouri, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Cedar pollen can travel hundreds of miles.

Usually, cedar pollen will peak in January and February as we are now seeing it in our OAAC mold and pollen counts. We can detect cedar pollen in Oklahoma even through April and May. Even in the cold of the winter, cedar pollen can make the winter months miserable for those who are allergy sufferers.

When the cedar tree pollen starts showing up in the OAAC allergy counts, and you begin feeling miserable, you may need to be tested. An allergy test will identify which pollens causing an allergic reaction. Your OAAC provider will also take an intensive medical history. After the test, then your OAAC provider will come up with a plan to help you find the best way to manage your allergies.

Treatment

The good news is cedar allergy can be treated and managed. The first



Mountain Cedar Photo by Texas A&M Forest Service

line of defense is to limit cedar pollen exposure. Follow OAAC on social media or check the website for the daily pollen count (Monday-Friday). You can also catch the pollen count on the local TV stations during the newscasts. If the pollen count is high, try to stay indoors as much as possible. If you must be outside, wear a mask which can prevent pollen from getting in nasal passages and mouth. Sunglasses or glasses will help keep pollen out of your eyes. The pollen count is generally highest in the morning or early afternoons. Limit your outdoor time to the evening hours if possible.

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Stress and Atopic Dermatitis

Can These Ideas Help with Your Symptoms?

Atopic dermatitis (eczema) is a chronic or recurrent inflammatory skin disease. "Atopic" means that there is typically a genetic tendency toward allergic disease. Atopic dermatitis usually begins in the first few years of life and is often the initial indication that a child may later develop asthma and/or allergic rhinitis (hay fever).

In infants, eczema usually appears as tiny bumps on the cheeks. Older children and adults often experience rashes on the knees or elbows (often in the folds of the joints), on the backs of hands or on the scalp.



It can be miserable but did you know stress can be a factor in flares with your atopic dermatitis (AD)? Stress can put your body in a fight or flight mode and increases stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol. If your body makes too much cortisol, your immune system will cause an inflammatory response in your skin.

The following are some helpful hints to stop a stress reaction in your body and your AD.

Deep Breathing

When you are stressed out, regulate your breathing with slow, deep breaths to slow down your heart

beat, lower blood pressure and relax muscles. Spend 15 minutes a day sitting still and slow down breathing.

Networking

Reach out and find others with AD and build a support group to get advice and find hope.



Shake Your Booty

Exercise can create a mood boost by release hormones called endorphins which can bring on happiness and calm feelings. You'll need to get your heart pumping for at least 15 to 20 minutes three times a week.

Stay Away from Stress Eating

Stop reaching for sugary, fatty, processed foods when stressed which will make AD symptoms worse. Keep healthy snacks on hand to curb any stress eating.

Meditation

It may sound silly, but meditation and mindfulness practices can be a real boost to managing stress. A few minutes each day can be extremely be beneficial.

On Pins and Needles

Some studies have indicated that acupuncture can lower stress and promote relaxation.



Get your heart pumping for at least 15 to 20 minutes three times a week.

Too Much Alcohol

An occasional drink is OK but too much or regular drinking can interfere with sleep. Don't rely on alcohol to make you relax, find another healthier option.

Just Say No

Look at your schedule and make sure you are not over-committed – another cause of stress.

Have Fun

Laughter is the best medicine to relieve stress. It boosts your oxygen intake and stimulates your heart, lungs and muscles, and increases endorphins.

“Everyone was polite, kind, friendly and professional. Exam room was clean. The doctor was personable, knowledgeable, and compassionate.”

(Dr. Bret Haymore)

—Luisa P.

Southwest Airlines Allows Nut Allergy Pre-Board Again

Southwest Airlines has announced it will allow those with nut allergies to be able to pre-board and wipe down their seats and tray tables for allergens. The policy was reversed, effective December 15th, after a disability complaint was made by four allergy nonprofit organizations. However, the groups still feel that all food allergies should be accommodated rather than just nut allergies.

Southwest's policy changed in September 2022 when those with food allergies were denied to preboard. Passengers could have extra time to board after the first boarding group which upset many food allergy passengers. On Dec. 1, Southwest told the Department of Transportation it would revert back to the previous policy.

Organizations behind the complaint included the Allergy and Asthma

Network, Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Connection Team and No Nut Traveler. The complaint was



a cease-and-desist order against Southwest with civil penalties, and food allergy crew training.

Anyone who deals with food allergies realizes this is a larger issue than just nut allergies. All food allergies can be equally as life threatening.

AAFA President and CEO Kenneth Mendez says that Southwest should recognize people with food allergies in the same way as other disability groups with respect to airlines and Southwest's policies.



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"The Allergist" welcomes your letters, comments or suggestions for future issues.

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Cedar Pollen...

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Showering more often will rinse off the pollen. Washing your hands and face will help if you don't have time to shower. Pollen also sticks to clothes so do laundry more often during cedar season. Change your bedding once a week to help with getting pollen off of your bed.

Trim cedar branches around your home or even consider eliminating them from your yard. This will also



help reduce pollen.

Keep those windows closed during

"This is the time of year that a few years back, we didn't seem to have as much volume but I think the cedar has definitely made a difference in how busy we are."

—OAAC Allergist Dr. Dean Atkinson

allergy season will help keep pollen out of your home. Running your air conditioner will also help and installing a HEPA filter. A HEPA filter vacuum and frequent dusting will aid in getting those pollens out of your home.

Medications

If limiting exposure isn't helping, it may be time to try medications such as antihistamines, nasal sprays and eye drops. If medications aren't working, cedar allergen immunotherapy injections to help build an immunity to cedar is another treatment option.

Back
to
school!

...after the Holidays



Now that children are back in school after the winter holidays, it's time to see what might be causing issues.

Pet Dander

Recent studies show that pet dander can be transported on clothing and putting allergic students at risk for an allergy or asthma attack. Don't let your child borrow friend's coats if they have pets and your child has pet allergies.

Lunch Box

For children with food allergies, hopefully by now you have alerted the teacher and other school staff about the allergies. Be sure and file that emergency action plan (you can download one from the OAAC website). Discuss with your child to never eat their friends' lunches or snacks.

Mold

Mold spores can trigger an allergy or asthma attack. Mold can be found in dark humid places such as basements, bathrooms or near leaky pipes. The good news is indoor mold and mildew can be eliminated using a detergent cleaning solution. Make sure your child's school repairs and seals any leaky roofs or pipes.



No Open Windows

During high pollen days, open windows will allow pollen and other airborne allergens to drift into the classrooms. Ask your child's teachers to keep windows closed. An air conditioner can help to cool and clean the air.

Asthma Action Plan

Make sure you have one in your child's file at school. This helps the teacher know what medications are needed to prevent an attack and how to use them. It also explains the warning signs of an asthma attack and how to treat an asthma episode.

Classroom Pets

Proteins found in the saliva, dander (dead skin flakes) or the urine of furry animals can be an allergy trigger. Symptoms could include sneez-

ing, itchy or runny nose and itchy, swollen eyes. Some children may even break out in hives (a raised, red rash). Make sure there is no contact with the pet by your child. You could also request that the classroom stick to pets with no hair such as turtles, hermit crabs, fish or snakes.

Treats

This is a tough one for kids and parents. Birthdays and holidays can mean special food treats. Try to work with the teacher and child to avoid those known allergens. Keep a supply of allergy-free treats at school for unexpected celebrations.

Carpeting

Carpets harbor dust mites which can trigger allergies. Hardwood, tile or

Furry classroom pets can be allergy triggers.



linoleum is better for those with allergies.

Medications

Make sure teachers (and subs) know your child has asthma and know what to do in case of an attack. Keep an inhaler or Epi-pen to school every day or keep them with the school nurse.

Chalk

Even chalk dust can trigger an asthma attack. Ask your child to wash his or her hands after writing on the chalk board.

FDA Updates Sesame Allergy Labeling Rules

Effective January 1, 2023, foods containing sesame will be subject to specific food allergen regulatory requirements, including labeling and manufacturing requirements, according to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Sesame is joining the list of major food allergens defined in the law as the result of the Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education, and Research (FASTER) Act, which was signed into law April 23, 2021.

Sesame joins eight other major food allergens: milk, eggs, fish, Crustacean shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, and soybeans.

Foods already in interstate commerce before 2023, including those on retail shelves, do not need to be removed from the marketplace or relabeled to declare sesame as an allergen. Depending

on shelf life, some food products may not have allergen labeling for sesame on the effective date. Consumers should check with the manufacturer if they are not sure whether a food product contains sesame.

A leading study on sesame published in *JAMA Network Open* in 2019 found that sesame was the ninth most common allergen in the U.S. This is an impact of about 1.5 million adults and children or 1 in 200 people.

Now due to the new regulations product labeling must include in bold letters or underneath ingredients “contains sesame.”

Approximately 80 percent of those with a sesame allergy also have another food allergy. A severe allergic reaction has been experienced by one-third of sesame

Now due to the new regulations product labeling must include in bold letters or underneath ingredients “contains sesame”

allergic people and they had to use epinephrine.

Sesame is often a hidden ingredient in foods such as tahini, hamburger buns, sauces, dressings and desserts.

The FDA recommends checking with the manufacturer if you aren’t sure if a food product contains sesame.

For more details, visit www.fda.gov/food/

Exercise and Asthma

Exercise-induced bronchoconstriction (EIB)

also known as exercise-induced asthma is common in those who have chronic asthma and experience flare-ups while exercising. EIB can also occur in those who only experience asthma symptoms when they exercise.

Those with EIB may experience problems breathing within five to 20 minutes after exercising. EIB symptoms are similar to chronic asthma but timing of the symptoms is closely linked to physical activity.

EIB symptoms may include wheezing, chest tightening, coughing, shortness of breath and in rare instances, chest pain.

EIB Triggers

Sensitivity to low temperatures and dry air can be a trigger. Air is usually warmed and humidified by the nose. During demanding activity, most people breathe more through their mouths. The cold, dry air enters the lower airways and your lungs without passing through your nose which triggers asthma symptoms.

Other triggers include air pollutants, high pollen levels and viral respiratory infections. Being out of shape, poorly-controlled nasal allergies or vocal cord issues could also be symptoms.

Diagnosing EIB

An allergist will take your health history, conduct a physical exam and perform a breathing test called a spirometry. If the breathing tests indicates a possible EIB diagnosis, your allergist can discuss the treatment regimen.

“I have recommended Dr. Hatch several times. I consider you guys as top of the top.”

— John T.



Remember to Follow OAAC on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram & Linked In

In addition to posting pollen and mold counts each day, OAAC also uses social media to post announcements or educational allergy news updates.

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