

Allergies in Obese Children

The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has identified overweight and obesity as one of ten leading health indicators and has called for a reduction in the proportion of children and adolescents who are overweight or obese. 16% of U.S. children and adolescents age two to nineteen are obese, and this percentage has been growing since the 70s. There has been little progress made toward decreasing the number of obese children and young adults in this country, and according to the Academy of Child And Adolescent Psychiatry, a child who is obese between the ages of 10 and 13, has an 80% chance of becoming an obese adult. Extra weight and obesity lead to other health problems, including type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol, and allergies.

In one study, four thousand young adults and children, ages 2 to 19 were studied and factors such as body weight, antibody levels to indoor, outdoor, and food allergens were analyzed. The study found that obese children and adolescents were 26% more likely to have some type of allergy and 59% more likely to have a food allergy. Although the study does not establish obesity as a clear cause of allergies, it points out the importance of maintaining a healthy body weight in children as a strategy to lower risk of allergies and asthma.

How is obesity assessed?

According to the CDC, an adult who has a Body Mass Index (BMI) between 25 and 29.2 is considered overweight, and a BMI of 30 or higher is considered obese. A child's body fat changes with age and the amount of fat in boys and girls is different, so age and gender are also taken into consideration when determining the BMI in children and young adults. BMI is used to find out if a child or teen falls into one of the following categories: underweight, of healthy weight, overweight, or obese.

Allergies

Allergy is the third most common chronic disease among children under 18. Allergies occur as a result of histamine release when the immune system overreacts to a substance that it either does not recognize or a substance that normally should not even cause a reaction.

The histamine release during an allergic reaction causes nasal congestion, post nasal drip, itching in the eyes, nose, ears, and throat, and sneezing. In cases of food allergy, skin rash, vomiting, and diarrhea can also occur.

In severe cases, an allergic reaction will impact the entire body, causing blood vessels to dilate and blood pressure to drop. The patient will have a rapid but weak pulse, hives, dizziness and nausea. In addition his or her throat will swell, blocking the ability to breathe. This is considered an anaphylactic reaction which will require emergency medical attention since the inability to breathe could kill the patient within minutes.

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What to Do About Allergies in Children

The most common cause of allergies are dust mites. Dust mites are not visible to the human eye. They live primarily on tiny flakes of human skin shed each day and are found in carpeting, mattresses, house dust, stuffed animals, and bedding. They are also found in feathers, cat dander, food, plant and insect parts, and mold spores. It is the dust mite waste products, not the dust mites themselves that cause an allergic reaction.

Dust the house daily, especially if the floors are covered with carpet. Hard wood flooring eliminates the dust mite problem by 90 percent. Rather than using feather dusters or paper towels, it's best to use microfiber cloths, dusters, and mops which are made with positively charged ultramicrofibers that pick up everything, including dust.

Vacuum frequently, using a vacuum with a HEPA (high efficiency particulate) filter. HEPA filters prevent dust from stirring up in the air. All fabric items in the house should be vacuumed; furniture, draperies, cushions, and pillows. If the allergic child is nearby, it's recommended to have them wear a dust mask to prevent a possible allergic reaction. It's also best to vacuum the child's mattress as dust mites most likely live within the mattress fibers as well.

Choose allergen-impenetrable encasings for bedding. These encasings can be purchased at specialty stores or on-line, and are made to completely encase mattresses, pillow, blankets, and box springs.

Wash bedding in hot water every other week. The water temperature should be at least 130 degrees Fahrenheit to kill dust mites. Throw rugs should also be washed periodically.

Minimize the number of stuffed animals in the house, especially in children's rooms since they get covered with dust, and also can be infested with dust mites. If there are stuffed animals in the bedroom, they should also be washed in hot water every other week.

Reduce the humidity in the home by keeping temperatures cool and using a dehumidifier in the cooler months.

Filter the air inside the house, using air-purifying filters, and change the filters once every six months.

Take your shoes off upon entering the house. Most of the dirt in a house is carried from outside, so when we enter the house with our shoes on, we bring all the dirt and allergens on the bottom of our shoes inside our house. On the same note, shoes should not be stored in the bedroom where children sleep because the dirt and dust on them can trigger allergies. At the very least, doormats should be placed at entrances to the house, so that residents and guests can wipe their shoes before entering the house.

Since excess weight can exacerbate allergies in children, it is also essential to help children reach a healthy weight.

Avoid using food as a reward or punishment.

Limit the time children spend watching TV or playing video games to 30 minutes each day. Aside from inactivity, watching too much TV encourages snacking and exposes children to junk-food marketing.

Encourage physical activity in children. They can walk the dog or wash the car or do dishes after dinner.

Pack healthy lunches and snacks for school days and field trips. Incorporate more fruits and fibrous vegetables in their daily diets and avoid sugary sodas or juices.

Plan the family meals ahead so that there is no last minute need to get take out or order for delivery.

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