Fall Ragweed Season Causes Misery

Guest post by Dr. Brandon Humble

As many Oklahomans know all too well, the season that typically runs from late summer through late fall is accompanied by an increase in misery for allergy sufferers. Ragweed is the main culprit during this period. It is a very potent allergen in which a single plant can release more than a billion spores of pollen. Although low levels of ragweed pollen (also known by its scientific name Ambrosia) can be present for many months, the Oklahoma Allergy and Asthma Clinic set out to find out at what times of the year ragweed levels are generally the worst here in central Oklahoma. OAAC is a certified pollen counting station, which means the laboratory professionals who do the daily work of counting allergens are rigorously tested for their ability to identify pollens and molds that are causing patient symptoms. This data is then compiled and reported on our website, and shared on our social media.

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Aspirin Exacerbated Respiratory Disease (AERD) is also called Samter’s Triad or Aspirin Sensitive Asthma, is a chronic medical condition where an asthmatic patient shows sensitivity to aspirin and other non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs also known as NSAIDs. Approximately 10 percent of asthmatic adults and 40 percent of asthma patients who also have nasal polyps are sensitive to aspirin and NSAIDs.

Typical symptoms of this disease include asthma, nasal congestion and nasal polyps. Many times, people with this disease don’t respond to conventional treatments.

“Chronic sinus infections and the loss of smell can also accompany these symptoms,” said Laura Chong, M.D., OAAC board-certified allergist. “The one thing that differentiates AERD is that there is a reaction triggered by aspirin or other NSAIDs.”

Aspirin sensitivity causes issues for asthmatic patients

Reactions could include:

- nasal congestion or stuffiness
- eye watering or redness
- cough, wheezing or chest tightness
- frontal headache or sensation of sinus pain
- flushing and/or a rash
- nausea and/or abdominal cramping
- general feeling of discomfort, sometimes accompanied by dizziness

“Those who have AERD should avoid using aspirin or any other NSAIDs,” Dr. Chong said. “Acetaminophen, also known as the brand name of Tylenol, can be tolerated at low doses of below 1,000 milligrams. It can be used as pain reliever but some people might have a mild reaction if higher doses are taken. Medications such as Celebrex can be safely used.”

Despite avoidance of aspirin or other NSAIDs, those with AERD can still experience asthma, nasal congestion and sinusitis and nasal polyps, Dr. Chong added.

Those who have AERD need medications such as daily inhaled corticosteroids to control their asthma symptoms. Intranasal steroid sprays or nasal-sinus steroid irrigation can also help control symptoms of chronic rhino sinusitis and nasal polyps.

Leukotrienes are chemicals the body releases when the immune system senses an allergen. These inflammatory chemicals cause the airways in the lungs to tighten as well as cause the production of excess mucus and fluid. Medications that block production of leukotrienes can help treat AERD symptoms and help decrease the reaction severity to aspirin and NSAIDs. Some with AERD will require polyp surgical removal, however the polyps generally reoccur.

Aspirin desensitization is another treatment option that can help AERD patients.

Patients who are desensitized to aspirin and continue aspirin therapy are shown to have less nasal congestion, less polyp regrowth and improved sense of small and an improvement in their asthma symptoms. Desensitization is a process in which the immune system is exposed to gradually increasing doses of a substance in order to modify or stop the allergic response.

“This procedure should be done at a medical facility or in a hospital,” said Dr. Chong, “The goal is to gradually increase doses of aspirin until the patient can tolerate a full dose of aspirin. Then the patient can safely taken aspirin or other NSAIDs.”

For more information about AERD, talk to your OAAC allergist.

Source: aerd.partners.org
Meet Lisa Byers who supervises the radiology and clinical lab. She has worked for OAAC for five years. In addition to her role as a supervisor, she does all of the x-rays and CTs for the clinic.

A lifelong Oklahoman, Lisa has lived in Norman her entire life. She graduated from Norman High School. She graduated from Rose State College’s x-ray school and then received a Bachelor of Science degree in Medical Imaging and Radiation Sciences from the University of Oklahoma.

Lisa holds four registries with the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists which include: Radiography, Computed Tomography, Mammography, and Quality Management.

In her off time, Lisa is passionate about her volunteerism at the Oklahoma City Zoo for the last eight years. She volunteers in the Great Escape, an exhibit that features large primates such as gorillas, orangutans and chimpanzees.

She has also recently taken up photography which goes hand in hand in her volunteerism at the zoo.

What does she like best about working at the OAAC?

“I like that we are a big family,” said Lisa, “I really like all of our doctors. You can’t ask for a better group of people to work with.”

**Lisa Byers Gets to Explore Her Love of Primates and Her Hobby of Photography at the Oklahoma City Zoo. Byers serves as the OAAC supervisor of the radiology and clinical lab.**

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**Untreated Allergic Fungal Sinusitis Could Lead to Vision Loss**

Your sinuses are delicate parts of your nasal system. They can become inflamed, infected and can even develop an allergic reaction to mold. Over the years, allergic fungal sinusitis (AFS) has been mistaken for a sinus tumor. Now allergists believe it to instead be an allergic reaction to environmental fungi. In the past, fungal disease could result in an invasive, deadly disease before it was properly diagnosed.

“The infecting fungi or mold result in a reaction of thick fungal debris, sticky mucus and a blocked infected sinus,” said Brett Haymore, M.D., OAAC board-certified allergist. “Those who have AFS may have allergies, nasal polyps and even asthma.”

If AFS stays untreated, it could lead to displacement of the eyeball and vision loss.

“It’s more common in adolescents and young adults,” Dr. Haymore said. “Many AFS patients develop chronic sinusitis and this can end up affecting their sense of smell.”

AFS patients may have allergies, nasal polyps, chronic sinusitis and some may also have asthma.

“The Allergist” is published quarterly by the Oklahoma Allergy & Asthma Clinic. Contents are not intended to provide personal medical advice, which should be obtained directly from a physician.

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

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A life-saving medical device that injects the medication epinephrine has been a top news story due to an enormous price increase making the price more than $600 per EpiPen. The manufacturer Mylan N.V. has been highly criticized for making the price of out of the range of many consumers. EpiPens are only good for one year to 18 months and then must be replaced. The price has hiked more than 500 percent from $94 since 2007 when Mylan acquired the product. After public outcry, Mylan recently introduced a coupon to reduce the price covering up to $300 off the patient’s co-payments.

The allergists at the OAAC advise against purchasing an EpiPen from any source other than a recognized pharmacy. Due to the price increase, EpiPens have been showing up on Craigslist and Ebay.

Due to the controversy over the cost, Mylan will give free EpiPens to uninsured patients with incomes below 400 percent of the federal poverty level (per Mylan, the limit would be $97,200 for a family of four). Patients have to apply for this every year and provide financial documentation (rxassist.org). Also there is a $300 savings card available on www.epipen.com/copay-offer/ along with a plan to release a generic version of the EpiPen for around $300.

Fall Ragweed Season...
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In 2014, ragweed levels increased from the 6th August to the end of that month and stayed elevated until the 22nd of October. Levels began to fall in late October, although the first freeze was not until the 11th of November. In 2015, low levels of ragweed were present in August, where from the 6th to the 31st there was a steady increase in the count. Ragweed levels remained high until late October when they began to decline, approximately the same time as the first freeze.

In 2016, ragweed started appearing the 4th of August while very high alert levels started the 9th of September.

Although management of every allergy season should ultimately begin with a visit to your allergist, knowing when your symptoms may be worsened will better help you and your allergist treat your symptoms.

Dr. Brandon Humble is currently a PGY-1 in residency in Internal Medicine at LSU-Shreveport. He completed his Bachelors in Biochemistry at Oklahoma State University and medical school at the University of Oklahoma.

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tissue. Steroids may be prescribed before the surgery.

“AFS can reoccur and may require additional surgeries,” Dr. Haymore added. “Also, anti-inflammatory medications are used to help treat AFS.”

Furthermore, research has shown allergen immunotherapy (shots) to fungal allergens may be effective in the treatment of symptoms of AFS and may decrease the rate of postoperative exacerbations and further operations.