Americans Sneeze More As Allergies Mysteriously Increase

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If you think you're seeing more people sneezing and tearing up this allergy season, you might be right. Studies show that allergies are on the rise in developed countries, including the United States - not just seasonal allergies, but allergies of all kinds.

An allergy is a reaction of your immune system to what are usually harmless, run-of-the-mill substances, such as pollen, cat hair, or even a peanut. About 54 percent of Americans are sensitive to at least one allergy-inducing substance, according to a national survey conducted from 1988 to 1994 by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). That's about two to five times higher, depending on the allergen, than the rates found by NIH between 1976 and 1980.

The result: Americans are sneezing and wheezing and rubbing itchy eyes more than ever.

The insurance claims that people file when they see an allergist also document an increase, according to Dr. Jacqueline S. Eghrari-Sabet, an allergist at Family Asthma & Allergy Care in Gaithersburg, Md., and a fellow of the American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology.

And food allergies in children have also experienced an uptick. From 1997 to 2007, the number of children with food allergies rose 18 percent, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"You walk in to any kindergarten, and there all peanut-free kindergarteners because of the high incidence of peanut allergy," said Eghrari-Sabet. "Those kids are real, and they weren't there the generation before."

While no one knows for sure what's fueling the increase in allergies, Eghrari-Sabet and others suggest some possibilities, including:

We're too clean

Cleanliness could be to blame. The "hygiene hypothesis" proposes children aren't exposed to enough dirt, bacteria and other infectious agents early on, and their under-stimulated immune systems goes on the offense when exposed to benign stuff like food.

*Their 'bored' immune system goes out and attacks a peanut, an egg, wheat, milk - foods that are in everybody's diet quietly normally," Eghrari-Sabet said.

Previous studies have shown that children in daycares, known to be hotbeds for spreading germs, have fewer allergies than those raised at home with less contact with other kids, said Dr. Richard Honsinger, an allergist and immunologist at Los Alamos Medical Care Clinic in New Mexico.

However, Eghrari-Sabet notes that while both statements are true - children are kept in cleaner
environments, and children have more food allergies than ever before - this doesn't make the hygiene hypothesis true.

Global warming

The rise in carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere and warming global temperatures could also be contributing to the allergy increase.

A 2005 study found that plants are flowering earlier in the year, and total pollen production is increasing. A more recent study in Italy found that not only had pollen levels increased in the area, but the populations’ sensitivity to pollen had increased as well. While genetics plays a large role in all allergies, a longer and more intense pollen season could exacerbate symptoms.

We're too dirty

All the smog and other types of air pollution might also be making allergies worse, particularly asthma. However, while there is good evidence for the link between pollution and allergies in a test tube, it remains tough to prove in large populations of people, Eghrari-Sabet said.

Just more diagnoses

It's possible that the rising numbers are simply due to more people being diagnosed with allergies, Eghrari-Sabet said. "Whereas before people were told you just have dry skin or a rash, now they're told, you have eczema," she said.

With better allergy treatments, more sufferers might go to their doctor, bumping up diagnoses more. However, more diagnoses alone simply can’t explain the entire increase, especially for food allergies Eghrari-Sabet said.

Mystery remains

The real culprit remains a mystery. We're too clean, we're too dirty and everything in between; all of these hypotheses could be operating simultaneously, or all could be untrue.

"They're really pretty much all on the same level, and the reason for that is because they are all equally hard to prove," Eghrari-Sabet said.

However, Honsinger thinks that the hygiene hypothesis has the most backing in terms of evidence, and is the most likely to be the correct explanation.

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Mystery remains unexplained.

"I don't think we have a single cause, and I don't know if we have an answer for sure," he said.

And it remains unclear if an answer will come anytime soon. Funding tends to go toward research into what's causing it, Eghrari-Sabet said.

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So basically human existence is on the rise, therefore allergies are on the rise. Makes sense to me.

Replies (1)

Maybe the increase in allergies is caused by the same thing that is killing off all our honey bees?

Replies (3)

When were GMO's (genetically modified organisms) introduced? Why aren't we looking closer at our food chain and its' impact on allergies?

Replies (3)

So I am guessing they are going to find a way that Americans live their life to blame this on, when it is obvious that it is the oversaturation of medications on the market which are pushed on the people through TV and radio. There is a pill to treat everything but NONE to CURE ANYTHING. There will never be another disease cured, big pharma makes too much off treatment. Theres no mystery we use medications so much for such trivial things that our bodies aren't making the defense mechanisms we need anymore. Someday humanity will screw themselves up so much there will be no choice but to take pills. I hope i'm dead then.

Reply

We medciate our children, ourselves, our food supplies and our water... there really is no mystery, we alter everything because we are so arrogant as a species that we forget nature is and always will be, adaptable, well those of us who live in the real world of creation not religulous ideas.

Reply

Nice article. explains my extremely difficult breathing that ive been having for about a month now.

Replies (1)

The reason is that we live in a chemical soup. We face many thousands of chemicals every day and each must be handled by our immune system. This daily bombardment to us exhausts our immune system so we can't deal with the environment. This leads to ever increasing cancer, allergies,auto immune problems. Check the American Chemical Society for numbers of chemicals in our environment.

Replies (1)
Has anyone noticed the unmarked white jet planes that leave stripes of white all over the skies, which spread out to look a little like clouds, and last for hours and hours until they dissipate?

You know, the ones the government says do not exist? Why would they deny the existence of something that can clearly be seen by all? What is in those trails, and where do the contents go?
Right into our lungs.

Why would they do this? Because the medical industrial complex makes unfathomable amounts of money from the sale of allergy drugs.

And that is just the chemicals they are deliberately spraying on us.

Absolutely everything is polluted because companies like Monsanto are allowed to do absolutely anything they want to the earth, water, and air. For money. Because they own our legislators and all other politicians.

And if their operations affect the health of the people, so much the better. More money, more money.

Look it up. You will see the truth.

Replies (8)

Greybird  Fri Mar 26, 2010 10:05 am PDT | Report Abuse

Thank you, Mom, for raising me in a house with plenty of birds and animals, live plants growing in real soil, and a small amount of dust and dirt in the corners. Thanks for letting me pick up bugs and play in the mud. Thanks for making me play outside when the weather was nice and allowing me to even when it wasn't. Thanks for cleaning the house and us kids with detergents and soap - not poison.

I feel so sorry for the poor, antibiotic and disinfectant-plagued children who will be doomed to suffer from every random disease and allergy that comes along throughout their lives. Are they being protected to death?? Sometimes I wonder ...

Replies (3)

Jonathan  Fri Mar 26, 2010 11:20 am PDT | Report Abuse

What, nobody is blaming President Obama?

Replies (2)

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