

## THE ALLERGIC PATIENT

Allergic diseases are due to a sensitivity which certain persons develop to normally harmless substances. A susceptible person who is exposed to these substances has symptom of disorder in the respiratory organs, the digestive organs or the skin. The most common of these disorders are hay fever, asthma, stomach and intestinal disturbances, rashes due to contact, eczema and hives.

Substances capable of producing allergy are called allergens. When a particular allergen is absorbed by the body, the minute cells in the tissues manufacture special substances...antibodies...which interact with it. This produces an irritation in the susceptible tissues; for example, the nose, the bronchial tubes or the skin.

The range and variety of things to which susceptible persons may become sensitive are almost endless. Sensitivity usually occurs only after repeated exposure to the substance. Allergy patients may be sensitive to more than one allergen.

### **ALLERGENS ENTER THE BODY BY VARIOUS ROUTES:**

1. By being swallowed-food, drinks and drugs.
2. By being inhaled-dust, pollens, fumes.
3. By external contact-clothes, cosmetics, industrial products.
4. By injection-drugs and serums.

The tendency to become sensitized or allergic to some foreign substance is usually inherited. It is a peculiarity of the constitution just as the coloring of the eyes. It also appears that what one will become sensitive to depends in part upon the amount of exposure to any foreign substance or allergen. Thus, an individual who has inherited this tendency to become sensitive to foreign substances may become sensitive to cow's milk shortly after birth, may become sensitive to dog hair at the age of six years after acquiring a dog and throughout his life may develop new sensitivities as his new environment subjects him to new exposures. The previous sensitivities may remain or may be lost.

There are two basic methods of treating allergy. First, the removal of the allergen from the patient, or second, an attempt to build up the patient's resistance to his allergens by the injection of a small amount of antigen at regular intervals.

The elimination of the offending allergen from the patient's environment is the method of treatment that is preferred. This method is attempted in many ways. If the allergen is animal hair, the offending animal is eliminated. If it is a food, the food is restricted or eliminated. If it is house dust, an attempt is made to dust-proof the sleeping area and the rest of the house wherever it is at all possible.

In such cases, the amount of relief from symptoms is directly proportionate to the thoroughness with which the allergens are eliminated.

The second method which is referred to as desensitization by injection is necessary when the offending allergen cannot be eliminated. This type of treatment is utilized when the sensitivity is to airborne seasonal pollen grains, mold spores and dust. It is obvious that when these factors are present their elimination is impossible.

Every method of treatment is aimed at producing an allergic equilibrium or balance. Avoidance or desensitization produces the balance, but other factors play a part in disturbing the equilibrium by adding additional burdens which will allow an allergic attack to develop.

The most common contributors to such a destruction of balance are infections (the common cold), fatigue, emotional excitement, over exertion and dramatic temperature changes. These factors must always be taken into consideration. Desirable hygiene is often a solution.

The first step in treating an allergic patient is to detect which substances or allergens are the major offenders. This is done in many ways. The first is the skin test. There are several modification of skin testing, but the most common is scratch test. Tests are clues and must be interpreted cautiously. The second method is an accurate and close observation over a long period of time of the patient's environment, habits and diet. The diet can be determined by keeping a diet diary and observation the frequency of the any food as it appears in relation to the attack. A modification of this is to systemically eliminate certain suspected allergens from the diet for atrial period of several weeks.

From this discussion, it will be seen that the treatment of the allergic child seldom depends upon one factor, but is a well-rounded scientific investigation of the history, the environment, the emotion and the hygiene of the patient.