

THE "INFO"-HALER



TAKE IN THE INFORMATION

An easy to understand, informative newsletter for our patients of all ages from the *Allergy & Asthma Associates of Michigan, P. C.*

ANTIHISTAMINES

Antihistamines were first discovered by French scientists in the 1930s. They are used to counter the effects of histamine, a chemical mediator released by the body's mast cells in an allergic reaction. Histamine is found in all body tissue and fluid, but is concentrated in the skin, lining of the nose, the lungs, and gastro-intestinal tissues. During an allergic reaction, histamine is released in abundance into surrounding tissues causing symptoms such as runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, post-nasal drainage, itchy nose, throat, roof of mouth, or ears, red, watery, and itchy eyes, and skin eruptions or hives. Antihistamines do not cure, but help relieve these allergy symptoms. They are not effective in opening airways or in treating severe conditions of any sort. They do, however, counteract histamine and therefore are most effective when taken before symptoms develop, or at the first sign of allergy symptoms. They are readily absorbed when taken orally, and usually begin to work within fifteen to thirty minutes after ingestion.

There are many types of antihistamine products on the market. Some antihistamines require a prescription, and some can be purchased over the counter (OTC). Some are purchased in pure form, while others are combined with medications such as decongestants. Antihistamines can be purchased in short-acting, long-acting, or sustained-release varieties. The short-acting varieties can be taken every four to six hours and are most effective when taken before an anticipated allergic problem, or at the onset of an unexpected allergic problem. The long-acting and sustained-released varieties can be taken every twelve to twenty-four hours and are better suited to chronic, long term preventative use. Antihistamines come in liquid, tablet, capsule, sprinkle, chewable, or injectable forms.

Since antihistamines work to counter the effects of histamine, and histamine is found in all body tissues, then antihistamines are potentially absorbed throughout the body. They can affect almost any body tissue while acting on the target site, the nose. There are numerous potential side effects of antihistamines, though many of the newer varieties of antihistamines have been specially prepared to prevent the most troublesome side effects. The most common side effects of antihistamines include dryness of the mouth, drowsiness, fatigue, and weight gain. Uncommon side effects include difficulty in urinating, hyperactivity, palpitations, headache, and stomach upset. Age decreases a person's ability to metabolize medications and excrete them from the body. Senior citizens may have more problems with antihistamines than others since the medicine may accumulate in their bodies. Side effects can be minimized by seeing the Doctor on a routine basis, taking the proper medication doses, measuring liquids accurately, swallowing time-released tablets whole (don't chew), following directions carefully, and taking only one antihistamine at a time unless advised differently by the Doctor.

Antihistamines are not to be used (unless specifically directed by the Doctor) in newborns or premature infants, nursing mothers, pregnancy patients with narrow angle glaucoma, peptic ulcer disease, prostatic hypertrophy, bladder neck obstruction, stomach obstruction, seizure disorders, patients taking MAO inhibitors (eutonyl, parnate, nardil, etc.), barbiturates, tranquilizers, alcohol, or during acute asthma attacks.

There are eight classes of antihistamines and each class is very different from the others in their actions as well as their side effects. If an antihistamine from one class does not meet your needs, quite possibly an antihistamine from another class may work fine. In general, when purchasing an over the counter antihistamine, the brands least likely to cause drowsiness are products containing Chlorpheniramine, Brompheniramine, Clemastine, or Loratadine such as Chlor-trimeton, Dimetapp, Tavist, Claritin, or Alavert. Benadryl is an excellent over the counter antihistamine and a

good drug to have in your medicine cabinet at home, however, it does cause drowsiness in many people and for that reason must be used with caution. Prescription antihistamines least likely to cause drowsiness or gastro-intestinal side effects are Clarinex, Allegra, and Zyrtec. Other frequently used antihistamines are Atarax, Vistaril, Periactin and Palgic.

In summary, there are many antihistamine products on the market with different molecular structures giving them different modes of action, and different side effects. When you are experiencing symptoms such as a runny nose, itchy nose, eyes, or ears, sneezing or post-nasal drip, an antihistamine should be taken. With the help of your physician, the correct product can be found.

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