

M.D. NEWS

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**Allergy & Asthma
Clinic of Wisconsin**

Helping Wisconsin Breathe Easier

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By Alexandra Strauss

As allergy season comes into full bloom in Wisconsin, Dr. Tad Johnson and Dr. Martin Lobel of the Allergy & Asthma Clinic of Wisconsin are preparing to do battle. Like coastal residents gearing up for a storm, the allergy experts of the region's longest-standing allergy office gear up for the growing number of seasonal sufferers who will undoubtedly need their help.

"I have a lot of allergies myself," explains Dr. Tad Johnson, who received his M.D. from the Mayo Clinic and trained in pediatrics before becoming board certified in allergy and immunology. "I had severe allergies as a child so I really can empathize with my patients."

And there are more and more patients with whom to empathize. When Allergy & Asthma Clinic of Wisconsin was established in 1933, allergies were much less prevalent and the single office saw only a fraction of the number of patients it sees today. Now, Drs. Johnson and Lobel maintain five locations throughout the Milwaukee area to keep up with the ever-increasing demand for their services.

ON THE COVER

Photo taken at the Mitchell Park Horticultural Conservatory, Milwaukee, WI.

"With our patient populations, we stay pretty busy, especially during the pollen season," says Dr. Johnson. "And during the winter, the indoor allergens become prominent."

The incidence of allergic rhinitis has risen by 100% in each of the last three decades. While there is no single explanation, Johnson notes that global warming is causing a rising world pollen count, triggering more hay fever. Whatever the cause, the problem is more than a nuisance.

"Uncontrolled allergic rhinitis causes absence from school and work. For some people, it triggers sinus infections. For others, it triggers asthma," says Dr. Lobel, a graduate of the Chicago Medical School. Dr. Lobel is also double board certified in pediatrics and allergy and immunology and has served southeastern Wisconsin for over two decades. "There definitely is a downside to not having allergies adequately controlled."

ALLERGIC RHINITIS

For most patients with allergic rhinitis, over-the-counter antihistamines are a first-line defense. If those don't provide adequate relief, patients may visit their primary care physician for a prescription product. It is those patients who *still* can't get relief who often end up in Dr. Lobel and Dr. Johnson's office.

A thorough history is an important part of the initial evaluation.



PHOTO BY DON RASK OF DTR PHOTOGRAPHY

“If one of the new nonsedating prescription antihistamines does the trick, great. But we suggest that physicians send patients to us when first-line therapy is ineffective or if there seem to be other complicating factors such as asthma or sinus infections,” says Dr. Lobel.

Such patients may be ideal candidates for immunotherapy. But before any plan of action can be implemented, thorough and effective testing must be completed. Allergy & Asthma Clinic offers traditional percutaneous allergy testing using the most highly purified and characterized antigens, specifically chosen for the Midwest region.

While Allergy & Asthma Clinic does sometimes also utilize RAST blood testing to confirm an allergen, Drs. Johnson and Lobel say percutaneous testing continues to be the most effective method for identifying both inhalant and food allergies that make patients miserable and, in some cases, trigger the more serious problem of asthma.

Allergy & Asthma Clinic puts a great emphasis on providing complete patient education. Educating patients about which specific allergens affect them and the best ways to avoid those allergens can often provide dramatic relief. When additional treatment is needed, Allergy & Asthma Clinic is a wealth of information in both paper and electronic formats. At their comprehensive website (www.allergyandasthmaclinic.com), referring physicians and patients can educate themselves on multiple treatment options, testing procedures, new drugs, etc.

ASTHMA

Like allergic rhinitis, asthma, a chronic disease of the lungs and airways, is also on the rise. The number of patients identified as asthmatic has grown steadily over the last 20 years and is now estimated at between 14 and 17 million. Dr. Johnson blames at least some of that growth on the decline in both indoor and outdoor air quality. Outdoors, smog, pollen and diesel fumes are common and increasingly prevalent triggers. Inside, irritants that might have once gone out the window such as pet dander and dust, become trapped and recirculated in tightly sealed and insulated homes.

“This is a problem because with asthma and with allergies in general, if you can avoid the trigger then you won’t have trouble with the asthma,” says Dr. Johnson. “In some cases, avoiding the trigger is easier, as with pet allergies. But with pervasive things like pollen and mold, it’s harder.”

And inhalants aren’t the only things that can trigger asthma. Irritants like cold air, viruses such as the common cold virus, and even exercise are frequent triggers. (Exercise-induced asthma is increasingly common in fitness-conscious teenagers.) The first step toward controlling asthma effectively is identifying those triggers.

Once triggers are identified, highly effective new allergy drugs combined with desensitizing therapies can help patients of all ages lead productive, healthy lives. The new monoclonal antibody, Xolair, is showing great promise for those with severe allergic asthma. Monoclonal antibody injections can help to permanently stop a patient’s



PHOTO BY DON RASK OF DTR PHOTOGRAPHY

Pulmonary function testing evaluates the effectiveness of asthma treatment.

reaction to a given allergic trigger.

“Monoclonal antibody therapy is promising. But one thing about asthma is that every patient is different,” says Dr. Lobel. “They all have their own unique triggers and their own level of responsiveness to the medications.”

That is why Drs. Johnson and Lobel emphasize the importance of a thorough patient history and are committed to spending plenty of time, especially in those initial appointments, getting to know each patient’s unique problem before developing an individualized treatment plan.

FOOD AND OTHER ALLERGIES

At Allergy & Asthma Clinic, percutaneous testing is often combined with atopic patch testing to identify food allergies. Like other types of allergies, food allergies are also becoming more prevalent. For those with severe food allergies — typically to things like nuts, fish and shellfish — the reaction can be life threatening. When a food allergy is suspected, confirming it early through testing can help patients avoid an anaphylactic incident.

Less severe food allergies can cause intestinal discomfort, skin reactions and eosinophilic esophagitis, a recently identified allergic reaction that mimics heartburn.

“Eosinophilic esophagitis has just been identified in the last couple of years and primarily affects young people,” explains Dr. Johnson. Patients may seem to have constant, uncontrolled heartburn. But when antacid therapy doesn’t help, an esophageal examination may reveal eosinophils, small ulcerated areas that are often caused by food allergies.

In about seven out of 10 cases, the experts at Allergy & Asthma Clinic can find the offending food allergen. “In most cases when you identify and eliminate that food, the heartburn goes away,” says Dr. Lobel.

Stinging insect allergies can also be life-threatening in some people. In these cases, injectable immunotherapy at Allergy & Asthma Clinic can be extremely effective for minimizing the reaction, especially in children. Venom immunotherapy involves a build-up phase during which shots are more frequent, followed by a maintenance



Allergy testing identifies the triggers of asthma and allergies.

phase. The result is a patient who no longer has to go through life terrified of bees or other stinging insects. And there may be another benefit to immunotherapy.

“In select patients such as children, allergy immunotherapy has been shown to prevent the development of new allergies,” says Dr. Johnson. “In some, it has also been shown to prevent the progression from allergic rhinitis to asthma.”

Dr. Johnson says allergy testing and treatment has improved dramatically over the past 10 to 15 years as knowledge about specific antigens and doses has grown. Allergy & Asthma Clinic now offers the most advanced therapies available from five different locations in the Milwaukee area.

That’s encouraging news for the 10% of the population — men,

women and children — who suffer from all types of allergies.

“The important thing we want these patients and their doctors to know is that there are very effective therapies out there,” assures Dr. Lobel.

“We can help them find relief.” ■



Allergy & Asthma & Clinic of Wisconsin, S.C.

Allergy & Asthma Clinic of Wisconsin — Services

- Asthma evaluation and treatment
- Pulmonary function testing
- Insect allergy testing and treatment
- Sinusitis workup and treatment
- Food allergy testing and treatment
- Drug allergy testing and treatment
- Hay fever diagnosis and treatment
- Eye allergy diagnosis and treatment
- Skin allergy diagnosis and treatment
- Contact dermatitis testing and treatment
- Latex allergy diagnosis and treatment
- Cosmetic allergy diagnosis and treatment
- Occupational allergic disorders diagnosis and treatment
- Urticaria (hives) evaluation and treatment
- Scratch/prick and intradermal testing for allergy diagnosis
- Patch tests for allergy diagnosis
- Immunotherapy (allergy shots)

Allergy & Asthma Clinic of Wisconsin — Locations

Phone Number: 1 (414) 271-4204

Milwaukee Office

324 E. Wisconsin Ave., Suite 900
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Waukesha Office

707 W Moreland Blvd., Suite 3
Waukesha, WI 53188

Mequon Office

12800 N. Port Washington Road
Mequon, WI 53092

Northwest Office

8532 W. Capitol Dr.
Milwaukee, WI

Greenfield Office

4448 W. Loomis Rd., Suite 103
Greenfield, WI 53220

Franklin Office (Opening
summer 2007)

10500 W Loomis Rd.
Franklin, WI 53132