

Clifford the Big Red Dog visits Allergy A.R.T.S.!



Recently, Clifford visited the Allergy A.R.T.S. clinic where he saw all of his many friends. Dr. Saadeh gave him a check-up, and Clifford was pronounced healthy and happy! Allergy A.R.T.S. is proud to sponsor the daily PBS television program "Clifford, the Big Red Dog" on the local public station KACV-TV2.

Photography by Shannon Richardson
www.shannonrichardson.com

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Exploring the Amazing Immune System



Education For A Healthier You

The wonders of the human body never cease to amaze me – especially the immune system. Sometimes it seems the more we understand about it, the more questions we have!

As an immunologist (and an allergist and rheumatologist), I regularly read about and study the latest research on the body's "security system." This allows me to better help you with immunity health issues - plus, I love to learn new things!

Your own understanding of the immune system is vitally important to your health, as well. The more you know about how it works, the better equipped you are to make good decisions and to work with your healthcare team to achieve optimum health.

I grant that it may seem a bit scary or intimidating at first to explore all the ins and outs of your disease challenges. However, I believe that in the long run you will feel better knowing exactly what challenges you face – and the positive actions you can take to become a healthier, happier you.

We are here to answer your questions, and can provide you with or direct you to the best educational resources.

To your health!
Constantine Saadeh,
M.D., FACP, FACR



Like an ever-ready security force, the immune system guards our bodies from disease and infection and constantly "patrols" our cells looking for early damage.

Some members of this finely tuned army are visible, and some are invisible, but all stand ready to attack and destroy invaders that threaten our health.

Unfortunately, the immune system sometimes gets confused and begins attacking non-threatening substances or tissues. An attack on plant pollen, for example, may result in rhinitis, with sneezing, runny nose and eyes, coughing and sinus pain.

A more threatening scenario, however, occurs when the immune system attacks one or more parts of the body itself, resulting in organ damage and/or autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis or lupus.

While a good immune system is absolutely vital to life, it also sometimes prevents us from what would otherwise be beneficial. Organ transplants, for example, face challenges when the immune system attempts to reject the new organ.

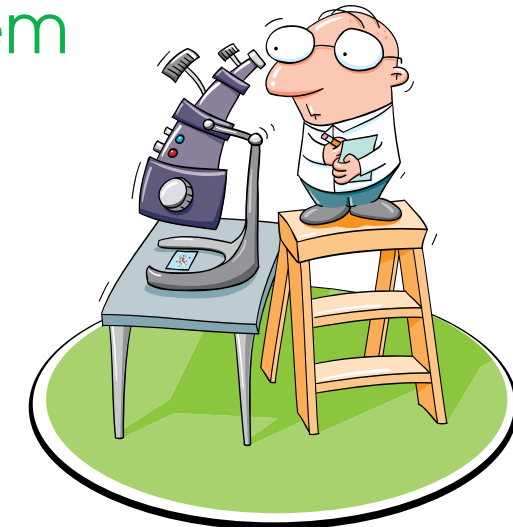
Let's take a closer look at the immune system and its many and varied components.

From the Outside In

The most visible part of the immune system is also our largest organ: the skin. Every second of every day our skin is bombarded with bacteria and viruses. That this tissue does an amazing job of protecting us becomes evident when we receive a cut to the skin that becomes infected – or not.

Our skin also secretes antibacterial substances that discourage mold and fungi from building up on the surface.

Any opening in our body is vulnerable, including our eyes, nose, mouth and other "doorways." When



we eat, our saliva and stomach acids kill much that threatens us through our food. When we breathe, tiny nose hairs catch some air contaminants, while mast "guard" cells in our nasal passages, throat, bronchial tubes and lungs mount a continuous campaign to kill any airborne germs that make it that far. Tears and mucus also contain an enzyme called lysozyme that breaks down the cell walls of many bacteria.

Now, let's travel deep inside the body to explore the "invisible" parts of the immune system.

Deep Down Protection

While far too complex to go into great detail here, this brief overview of some parts of the immune system will give one an idea of how truly amazing these guardians are.

Thymus – This important gland lives between the breastbone and the heart and is mainly responsible for producing T-cells, a type of white blood cell important to a healthy immune system. The thymus is especially vital to newborn babies who have an

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immature immune system, and who will die without it. Adults, however, can have the thymus removed and suffer few ill effects, as other mature immune system components take over.

Spleen – This fist-sized organ filters the blood, looking for foreign invader cells and old red blood cells in need of replacement. Located on the left side of the abdomen, it can be removed from an adult if damaged or diseased, but persons with missing spleens tend to get sick more often.

Lymph System – Most folks are familiar with a portion of this system – the “lymph nodes” located in the neck that can swell up when battling bacterial infection. The lymph system is spread throughout the body, similar to the circulatory system of blood vessels. However, the heart doesn’t pump lymph fluid. Instead it oozes through the system, bathing the body’s cells with water and nutrients. The lymph then absorbs the cell’s waste products and carries away random bacteria it finds. This “garbage-laden” fluid eventually arrives back at the lymph nodes for filtering and processing.

Bone Marrow – Here is where both red and white blood cells are born from stem cells. The red carry oxygen and food to and from the cells, while the

white are dedicated to the immune system.

White Blood Cells – These cells (composed of many different types, such as neutrophils and macrophages) are the “gladiators” that seek and destroy bacteria, toxins and viruses that invade the body.

Antibodies – Produced by white blood cells, antibodies are Y-shaped proteins that respond to a specific antigen (virus, bacteria or toxin). An antibody will bind itself to the outer wall of an antigen and either disable it or stop its movement. A large number of antibodies clinging to an antigen signal the complement system that this “invader” needs to be removed. One class of antibody is immunoglobulin E (IgE) which can be associated with allergic reactions.

Complement System – Like antibodies, the complement system also is a series of proteins. They are free floating in the bloodstream and are manufactured in the liver. They are called to duty by antibodies and work with them by bursting unwanted cell walls and signaling for the dead cell’s removal.

Hormones – Several hormones generated by immune system components are known as

lymphokines. (Certain hormones, such as steroids and corticosteroids suppress the immune system.) The hormone Tymosin encourages the formation of one type of white blood cell. The hormone interleukin is generated by white blood cells. Of interest is that when interleukin-1 (IL-1) reaches the brain’s hypothalamus, it causes fever and fatigue. When the body’s temperature is raised, some bacteria cannot survive and they die off.

Working Together

All of these immune system components, plus many more, work together in various, and often complicated, ways to protect the human body. Although we don’t know exactly how or why the immune system suddenly goes haywire – resulting in allergic reactions or autoimmune diseases – we can surmise that stress, poor nutrition, lack of physical exercise or some other factor might at times have a negative effect on one or more parts of the immune system.

As an immunologist – as well as an allergist and rheumatologist – Dr. Saadeh is uniquely positioned to help patients whose immune systems have been damaged or compromised. If you have questions, we are always here to help. ■

Allergies and the Great Outdoors!

If your allergies make you dread Spring and the new growing season with its billowing pollen clouds, you may feel just like Dorothy Parker, a famous New York newspaper columnist, who once wrote:

“Every year, back comes Spring, with nasty little birds yapping their fool heads off and the ground all mucked up with plants.”

Cynical humor aside, Spring and Summer truly can be a frustrating time, with allergy sufferers locking themselves inside and clinging to their filtered air conditioners, afraid to venture outdoors. To make matters worse, the warmer months also are the best times for the really fun stuff – from picnics and golf, to hiking, bike riding and softball.

What is going on?

Sometimes called “hay fever,” seasonal allergic rhinitis, or pollenosis, is the immune system’s hyped up response to what it considers threats – pollen and/or mold spores. Although they are otherwise non-threatening intruders, these tiny troublemakers affect one in four Americans, causing sneezing, scratchy throat, sinus pain, runny nose, coughing and itchy eyes.

Unfortunately, a person can become allergic at any time in his or her life. Most people peak in their

teens or early 20s, however. Young children who develop allergies may find their condition improves as they become older. It also is common to see symptoms decrease as people age and the immune system calms down a bit.

Pollen allergies are rarely life-threatening. However, those with asthma and/or a compromised respiratory system may need to take more serious precautions when pollen counts are high to avoid dangerous asthma attacks.

What helps?

It may help to first determine exactly what you are allergic to by scheduling an appointment with a qualified allergist, such as Dr. Saadeh.

Once you know, you can find out which allergens are at their peak before you even venture outdoors by going to www.allergyarts.com and clicking on “Pollen Count.” The table is updated daily by scientists at West Texas A&M University. This information also is broadcast daily during the KVII-TV Channel 7 local news programs.



Over-the-counter (OTC) allergy remedies, although FDA approved and which provide relief for some people, can be dangerous to persons with certain medical conditions. They also can create new health problems with long-term use.

It is important to discuss OTC remedies with your primary care physician or an allergy specialist to help determine the appropriate OTC for your specific needs. An allergist also can prescribe stronger and/or safer medications if necessary.

It is important to begin treatment early on – and preferably even before allergy season starts, so that you can “get ahead of” the symptoms and minimize suffering.

In more severe cases, **immunotherapy** may be in order. This is a three-to-five-year process during which a person receives injections of the allergens to which they are sensitive, and thereby desensitizing the immune system. A majority of patients who go through the entire procedure eventually see a reduction or eradication of allergy symptoms.

No matter what your individual situation, a visit to Allergy A.R.T.S. may indeed be your salvation this spring and summer – and all through the growing season! ■



Jacquie Huntington

Although Jacquie Huntington was born in Plainview, Texas, she grew up in Missouri and Utah and didn’t move back to the Panhandle until after her son’s birth in the mid 1990s.

Jacquie joined Allergy A.R.T.S. and its affiliate, the Amarillo Center for Clinical Research (ACCR), about five years ago. She hails from an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) background, serving in Claude, Texas and then as an EMT for Panhandle Emergency Training Services

and Response, providing emergency medical services at sporting events and concerts at the Civic Center and for the Amarillo Dillas.

Jacquie is certified not only as an EMT, but also as a Clinical Medical Assistant and most recently as a Clinical Research Coordinator.

“What drew me to my job here was the opportunity to learn an entirely new side of the medical field, as well as more in-depth patient care,” she explains. “As a Clinical Research Coordinator, my duties include: patient recruitment, conducting patient visits, data gathering, drug administration,

labs, reporting data to regulatory agencies and pharmaceutical companies, and a bit more.”

On a personal note, Jacquie has a 14-year-old son, Jackson (“talented, handsome, brilliant, of course ...!” she laughs) and a dog, Kiki. The family enjoys movies and road trips, and Jacquie is an avid reader and is training for her first marathon.

“Dr. Saadeh and so many of my co-workers are just the most brilliant people,” she concludes. “Every day at Allergy A.R.T.S./ACCR is an opportunity for learning!”



Claudia Seaton

You might say that Claudia Seaton’s main job is to make sure Allergy A.R.T.S. calls get answered and that patients know exactly where they are going. In other words, this Amarillo native is instrumental in keeping the clinic running smoothly.

With an education background in medical billing and coding, Claudia first worked as an optometric technician before joining Allergy A.R.T.S. as the

shot clinic receptionist in June 2007. This past November, she was offered the main receptionist and PBX (operator) position and “gladly accepted.”

In addition to answering incoming clinic phone calls, Claudia receives patients for infusion, ultrasound, bone density and lab walk-in patients. She also receives and signs for all incoming shipments and supplies – a task with exceptional responsibility.

“My greatest achievements in life,” says Claudia,

“are my three young boys: Isaiah, age 6, and twins Jonathan and Jaycob, age 2. They are my hobbies, so to speak. But I also like to work out and play tennis.”

Claudia enjoys the interaction with patients at Allergy A.R.T.S. and the staff with which she works, and she is grateful for the flexibility the job offers. “I look forward to continuing to be a part of the future success of Allergy A.R.T.S.”

Osteoporosis: It’s Beatable. It’s Treatable. May is National Osteoporosis Awareness and Prevention Month

If you are a woman over age 50 (and men should listen up, too) several factors may now come together that reduce your bones’ density over time. If not managed and treated appropriately, painful breaks may occur that could drastically reduce your activity levels and basic enjoyment of life.

The really good news is that much progress is being made in the field of osteoporosis prevention and treatment. With that in mind, the National Osteoporosis Foundation (NOF) is celebrating Osteoporosis Awareness and Prevention Month in May by producing and distributing information materials all across the country.

NOF’s new prevention and treatment guidelines include information that addresses women of all ethnic backgrounds, and one section also discusses osteoporosis in men. The latest calcium and Vitamin D recommendations can be found in the new material, as well.

These guidelines – and more – can be found on the NOF Web site www.nof.org. In addition, the Allergy A.R.T.S. staff is available to address your concerns about osteoporosis. They can help you find NOF materials if needed, as well as administer low bone density tests with our state-of-the-art equipment. Remember: osteoporosis is both “beatable” and “treatable!”

Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves.

James Barrie, author “Peter Pan”

Arthritis Support

Now in its fourth year, the Amarillo Arthritis & Fibromyalgia Support Group is again in full swing for 2008. Recommended by Allergy A.R.T.S., the group meets on the third Tuesday of each month at the Amarillo Northwest Branch Public Library, 6100 West Ninth.

The gathering begins at 6 p.m. with a gentle exercise class in Tai Chi, followed by a “meet and greet” social time. At 7 p.m. a special program and discussion are presented which may include such topics as pain management, medical updates, or a visit from a podiatrist.

The May meeting also includes an auction of gift baskets and special craft items. Money raised goes to help the less fortunate, as the group believes that “by helping others, we help ourselves.”

Mark your calendars to join us:

- May 20
- June 17
- July 15
- August 19
- September 16
- October 21

For more information, please contact Judy Moenter at 354-8828.