

## Oh Doctor! My Child has allergy. What should I do?

Sneha is a four year old child, often complaining of runny nose and irritation in the nose. With the regular complaints by her daughter, Neha became worried and decided to seek medical care. Neha and her family was relocated to the current place recently. She took an appointment with a reputed paediatrician, Dr. Prema, in the town.

Neha and Sneha went to meet Dr. Prema at her clinic. Dr. Prema was seeing a patient. Soon after, the doctor invited Neha and her daughter to her consultation room. The doctor spoke to the child, asked about her school and her likes and dislikes. The doctor then spoke to Neha at length asking various questions about Sneha's condition, eating habits, activities, birth history, health conditions immediately after birth and till date, and Neha's pregnancy details during her daughter's birth.

Neha recollected all the events, as much as possible, right from the conception till date about Sneha's health and illnesses. Sneha is an active girl. Neha revealed a fact that her daughter had caught an infection and was treated for that with antibiotics. This incident had happened in the first six months of her birth. Sneha was then

admitted for treatment. Other than this, Sneha's growth was normal and did not have any illness except the recent concern of runny nose and nasal irritation.

After listening to Neha on Sneha's medical history, the doctor suspected that the reason behind Sneha's runny nose and irritation could be due to the administration of antibiotics. Neha could not believe that the antibiotics used to treat her daughter's infection caused her allergy. She recollected her daughter's struggle with the infection.



The paediatrician empathised with Neha and told that the early exposure (before 2 years of age, especially during infancy) to antibiotics or any medicine like antacids usually results in food allergy, anaphylaxis, asthma, itching of the skin, eyes, nose or contact dermatitis. Doctor told the administration of antibiotics before birth and during infancy can also lead to obesity during childhood and sometimes in puberty also. The antibiotics and antacids administered to infants alter the type and amount of microorganisms in the stomach. These microorganisms are essential for the normal health and development of the child and linked to mental health, immunity, obesity, heart disease etc. Antibiotics used during pregnancy also increases risk of asthma during early childhood, few gastrointestinal diseases, childhood inflammatory diseases, including juvenile idiopathic arthritis. Change in the microorganisms' pattern in the body affects the nutritional status too and the child may not attain the height as expected at that age. In some of the cases, there can be alterations in the expression of microbial genes. Even though the administration of antibiotics at an early

age have many impacts, not all manifestations mentioned here occur in all the exposed children. The expressions of these symptoms may vary with age, gender, types and duration of antibiotic administered, administration to child or mother or both, etc.

The doctor went further and told that sometimes the medicines are essential to save the life of the infants and children and treat the illness of the mother during the pregnancy. In that case these symptoms are inevitable and to be treated as required.

**Ms. Neha:** Is there a way to prevent these effects? What is the role of a parent?

**Dr Prema:** Very apt question. Firstly, focus on prevention of illness. The list varies with the type of condition that we are trying to avoid/prevent.



Never the less, the following list can be followed. Some of the things to do are:

- ✦ Clean your hands
- ✦ Care for nutrition of the baby/child
- ✦ Get the vaccination appropriately (both mother and child as per the guidelines)
- ✦ Cover the mouth with a handkerchief while coughing and sneezing
- ✦ Hydrate adequately
- ✦ Avoid the baby/child coming in contact with the people with cold or respiratory infections
- ✦ Follow instructions as advised by your doctor

Secondly, the parents cannot see their children fall sick. They want the best treatment and care to be available to them. In such situations they tend to forget that many times the children will be down with minor viral infections and do not often require any medicines. The condition will subside on its own.

However, Please ensure the following whenever your child falls sick .

- ✦ Avoid self-medication\*
- ✦ Avoid over the counter medicines
- ✦ Take the child to the doctor for their assessment and advice, but, DO NOT insist the doctors to prescribe medicines, if the doctor feels the condition requires no medicine.
- ✦ Ask the doctor how important the medicines are for the condition (basically knowing if the medicines are really required for your child's condition)
- ✦ When required, ask for shortest course of medicines
- ✦ Adhere to your doctor's advice.

(\* not applicable if yourself a doctor)

## Medications during Pregnancy

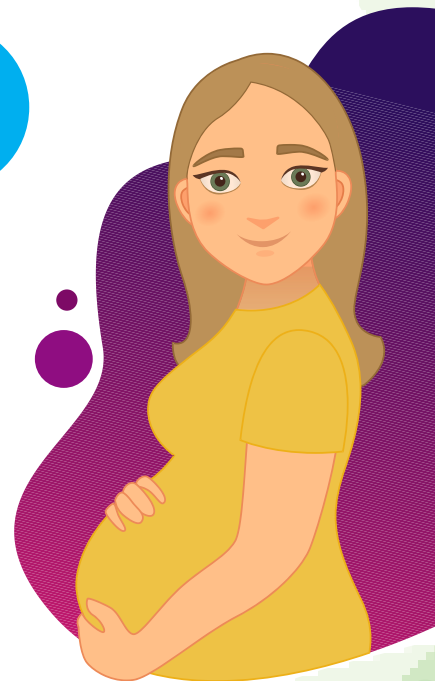
**Ms. Neha:** Thank you so much, Doctor! I shall follow your advice. Doctor, you said that the antibiotics taken by the mother during her pregnancy also cause allergy to the child. Is the effect on child related only to the use of antibiotics or are there any other medicines taken during pregnancy would have any effect on the growth and development of the child?

**Dr. Prema:** A very good question. It is not antibiotics alone that would have their impact on the child's health, there are many other medicines that could harm the baby in womb. Now, this takes our discussion to another different topic 'Medications during Pregnancy'.

There are many medicines taken during pregnancy that can lead to birth defects, pregnancy loss, prematurity, infant deaths, developmental disabilities or unknown effects. Let me give you some examples for easy understanding. You might have seen or heard of children born with cleft lip and /or palate, hole in the heart chamber walls,

defect in the belly wall, neural tube defect, build-up of fluid in the brain, an eye defect. Researchers have found that these defects are linked to the medicines taken by the mother during her pregnancy.

Any woman planning for pregnancy, or is pregnant, should take the help of the following points I am sharing here with you. This is just to sensitise the woman to seek the necessary medical advice and intervention to take good control of their health as well as their baby's health, so that the emotional, social and financial trauma associated with ill effects of the inappropriate medications during pregnancy can be avoided.



**Conditions:**

**Do you take any medicines (Allopathy, Ayurveda, Homeopathic, or any other) for**

- a. Head ache, Body pains, cramps, joint or muscle pain, sprains, injury, backache, arthritis, or other unspecified pain
- b. Depression control medicines
- c. Birth control pills (did you take)
- d. Thyroid disorders
- e. Asthma
- f. Antibiotics for infections
- g. Allergy drugs
- h. Drugs to treat epilepsy (fits)
- i. Migraine and headache
- j. Herpes infection
- k. Any other condition

**Do you:**

- a. Smoke
- b. Take any substances



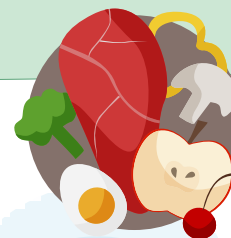
**Medications:**

- a. Are the medicines self-administered (you take medicines on your own)
- b. Have you taken the medicines directly from the pharmacy / Medical Shop (over the counter medicines)
- c. Have you consulted the doctor for your medications?



**Consulting the Doctor:**

- a. Have you informed the doctor (Obstetrician) on the medicines that you are taking
- b. Are you advised by the doctor to take the medicines



Let me draw your attention, even though it is recommended to avoid medicines during pregnancy, your doctor knows the best for you and for your health condition. Sometimes, as mentioned previously, the medications cannot be avoided completely. Discuss in detail with your doctor on all the changes in your health, any signs you notice so that your doctor can help you, your child and your family with better care.

I hope I was able to address some of your concerns and provide basic information on healthy mother and healthy child. Remember, this is just a brief of general information. Make sure that you consult your doctor for individualised assessment and advices.

**Happy Life !**

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