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Understanding Asthma

Asthma is a condition often thought to be a childhood illness, but the fact is, it usually persists into adulthood and can even start in adults. About 12 percent Canadian children and eight percent of adults have been diagnosed with asthma. A recent study, published in the *Annals of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology*, has pointed to an association between depression and the development of asthma. Knowing that stress can worsen asthma, researchers looked deeper and found the link. More study is needed to confirm.

Predisposition for Asthma?

One of the factors which can predispose a person asthma is what a fetus is exposed to in utero. Usually, this is considered to be foods or environmental pollutants, but now it appears that maternal stress, such as job loss, divorce or bereavement, can increase the likelihood of the infant developing atopy (a precursor to eczema & asthma) – even in absence of maternal history of asthma! One more thing to try to manage during pregnancy!?

Early childhood exposure to allergens is often thought to contribute to asthma in predisposed individuals, however preliminary findings are suggesting that specific allergens (cockroach, mouse, cat), introduced during the first year of life, may reduce the appearance of asthma later on! These surprising findings counter current strategies aimed at minimizing or eliminating such contact and will be investigated further.

Vitamin D – Effective or Not?

Vitamin D has been the darling of the supplement world recently, promoted as curing or preventing everything from arthritis to heart disease to cancer. Well, you may be scratching asthma off that list. Results published in *JAMA* demonstrated vitamin D produced no reduction in the frequency of asthma attacks or declining lung function, although subjects were able to drop their medication dose after 7 months of vitamin D therapy.

Asthma is a condition that tends to wax and wane over time. Late September is usually associated with a spike in asthma symptoms. Talk to your pharmacist about how best to use your inhalers and better manage your asthma.