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Link Between Allergic Disease and Irritable Bowel Syndrome

ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, IL – Adults with allergy symptoms report a high incidence of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), suggesting a link between atopic disorders and IBS according to a study published this month in *Annals of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology*, the scientific journal of the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI).

In a study of 125 adults, Mary C. Tobin, M.D., Department of Immunology/Microbiology at Rush University Medical Center, Chicago, and colleagues found the likelihood of IBS was significantly higher in patients with seasonal allergic rhinitis (2.67 times), patients with allergic eczema (3.85 times), and patients with depression (2.56 times).

IBS, which affects 15 percent of the general population, manifests itself in a cluster of symptoms including abdominal pain for 12 weeks within the past year, change in stool consistency or frequency, and relief of abdominal pain with defecation. Various findings suggest indirectly that allergen exposure may lead to IBS symptoms in some patients, but the frequency has not been studied.

“The reported presence of allergic dermatitis was highly correlated to the presence of IBS in our population,” investigators noted. “In atopic disease, allergic dermatitis is the first step of the ‘atopic march.’ In early childhood, AE (allergic eczema) is frequently associated with gastrointestinal dysfunction and food allergy. A clinical history of AE may be a useful marker for patients with gut hypersensitivity and atopic IBS.”

Asthma and IBS was reported by 12 of 41 patients (29 percent), which is similar to findings in a previous report. Authors propose that “this subgroup of IBS (atopic IBS) be considered separately from patients with IBS without atopic symptoms, because they may have distinct pathophysiologic features and may benefit from specific therapeutic interventions.”

Patient information on allergic diseases, including asthma, is available by calling the ACAAI toll free number at (800) 842-7777 or visiting its Web site at www.acaai.org.

An allergist-immunologist is a physician who specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of asthma and other allergic diseases. The allergist is specially trained to identify the allergic and non-allergic factors that trigger asthma and other allergic diseases. Allergists help people treat or prevent their allergy problems. After earning a medical degree, the allergist-immunologist completes a three-year residency training program in either internal medicine or pediatrics. Next the allergist completes two or three more years of study in the field of allergy-immunology in order to prepare for certification by the American Board of Allergy and Immunology.

The American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI) is a professional medical organization headquartered in Arlington Heights, Ill., that promotes excellence in the practice of the subspecialty of allergy and immunology. The College, comprising more than 5,000 allergists-immunologists and related health care professionals, fosters a culture of collaboration and congeniality in which its members work together and with others toward the common goals of patient care, education, advocacy and research.

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Citation: Tobin MC, et al. Atopic irritable bowel syndrome: a novel subgroup of irritable bowel syndrome with allergic manifestations. *Ann Allergy Asthma Immunol* 2008;100:49-53.

Annals of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology is online at www.annallergy.org.