WORRIED ABOUT WELL-BEING? ASK OUR EXPERTS

What causes eye, ear allergy?

Q Dear Doctor,
My son is grappling with an allergy that affects his eyes, ears, nose and throat to the extent that during an attack, he sneezes and rubs his eyes, nose and ears. The worrying bit is that his airway is always so congested that you can hear him breathe. What causes this kind of allergy and does it run in the family?

Worried Christine

A Dear Christine,
Your son could be grappling with allergic rhinitis, often combined with allergic conjunctivitis. Since it also affects breathing and the throat, it may be part of a broader allergic tendency sometimes linked to asthma.
An allergy happens when the body's immune system overreacts to harmless substances (allergens) in the environment. The common triggers include dust and house mites (very common indoors). Other triggers include pollen from grass and plants, cold weather or sudden weather changes, smoke, perfumes or strong odours, pet dander (fur), mold or damp environments.

When exposed, the body releases chemicals such as histamine, leading to sneezing, itchy eyes, nose, ears, and throat; and a runny or blocked nose.

Noisy or congested breathing suggests inflammation affecting his breathing passages.

Yes, allergies often have a genetic (inherited) component, meaning that if one or both parents have allergies, asthma or eczema, the child is more likely to develop allergies. However, the child may not have the exact same type of allergy.

Your son's medical situation needs attention because the symptoms you describe suggest moderate to severe allergy, which should be properly managed to prevent complications such as sinus infections, poor sleep, learning difficulties due to discomfort, and progression to asthma. You can reduce triggers at home by washing bedding regularly in hot water and keeping the house well-ventilated.



ASK THE DOCTOR

Questions were answered by Enid Mugume Ahimbisibwe, an ear, nose and throat specialist at Mulago Paramedical School and Dr Simon Muwanguzi, an eye specialist at Nakasero Hospital. They spoke to Agnes Kyotalengerire

My man has squinted eyes. Will I bear a child with same condition?

Q Dear Doctor,
I am dating a man with squinted eyes. I love him a lot, but my relatives have discouraged me, saying if I get married to him, we are likely to have babies with squints. What causes squints and do they run in families?

Worried Maggie

A Dear Maggie,
What you describe is a condition called 'strabismus', often referred to as a 'squint'. It means the eyes are not properly aligned and one eye may look straight, while the other turns inward, outward, upward or downward.

Strabismus can happen for several reasons, including eye muscle imbalance, where the muscles controlling eye movement are not well co-ordinated. It could be a result of nerve or brain control issues, where the brain may not correctly control eye alignment. Sometimes, squints result from refractive errors. Others may stem from childhood illnesses or developmental factors. Some may appear without a clear cause.

If one parent has strabismus, the risk of a child having the same condition is slightly higher than average. However, many children born to parents with squints have perfectly normal eye alignment. And some children develop squints even when no one in the family has it.

Strabismus is treatable,if detected early in children.