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Affording medications in a tough economy

Health care is a hot topic in today's economy. Whether you are in Congress debating the bill or a family forced to make health care decisions based on your financial factors, you have probably been touched by the crisis. One way families are saving money is by eliminating prescriptions.

Forgoing asthma and allergy medications could result in a devastating and very expensive outcome. Asthma and allergies are chronic conditions that require ongoing management. Your allergist prescribed your medications based upon your specific needs and to keep symptoms under control. Straying from the plan could lead to severe asthma symptoms and the need for costly emergency room treatment.

Your asthma action plan may include long-term and quick-relief medications. Both are important in symptom control. Long-term controller medications are taken on a regular basis (typically daily) to control airway inflammation and treat symptoms. Quick-relief medications are used to provide temporary relief of symptoms. Uncontrolled asthma can lead to missed work or school, emergency room visits, hospitalizations or even death.

Many people with allergies take allergy shots (immunotherapy) to relieve symptoms.

There are two phases to immunotherapy: build-up and maintenance. The build-up phase, generally ranging three to six months, involves receiving injections with increasing amounts of the allergens. The maintenance phase begins when the most effective dose is reached.

Because immunotherapy is successful by steadily increasing doses of allergens in your body, discontinuing treatments will send you back to square one in getting relief and cost you more over time. Ongoing allergy symptoms could result in sinus infections or worsening asthma.

Do not be afraid to talk to your allergist about prescription costs. Your allergist may be able to recommend generics, offer samples, or know of assistance programs so you can stay on track with your treatment plan.

If you need additional assistance, here are some tips.

- Ask your allergist if the medication's manufacturer offers rebates, discount cards or coupons.
- The Partnership for Prescription Assistance is an example of a prescription assistance program that helps qualifying patients get medications for a minimal charge or even free. For more information call (888) 477-2669 or visit www.pparx.org.
- Many state governments offer drug discount or senior assistance programs.
- Often, insurance plan mail order pharmacies are less expensive than a storefront pharmacy. However, because of the processing time, this option is not ideal if you need a prescription quickly.
- If your insurance plan does not require you to go to a certain pharmacy, shop around. Many pharmacies charge different amounts for the same prescriptions.
- Check with your allergist to see if splitting pills is an option to save you money.



DID YOU KNOW?

- Asthma accounts for 217,000 emergency room visits and 10.5 million physician office visits every year.
- An estimated 300 million people worldwide suffer from asthma, with 250,000 annual deaths attributed to the disease.
- Asthma accounts for about 10.1 million missed work days for adults annually.

→ *To the Point* ←

Taking your medication is important. Talk to your doctor.

An allergist/immunologist is the best-qualified medical expert to diagnose and treat allergies and asthma. To find an allergist/immunologist near you, visit the Physician Referral Directory at www.aaaai.org.

For more information on allergies and asthma, please visit the Patients & Consumers Center of the AAAAI Web site, www.aaaai.org.

