

[IMAGE]

Early Antibiotic Use Linked to Asthma

Asthma is the most common cause of chronic illness in childhood, affecting up to 12 percent of children in the U.S. Most children experience initial symptoms such as chronic cough, intermittent rapid breathing, shortness of breath, unusual fatigue or weakness, or feelings of tightness in the chest by the age of 5. Nasal allergies, family history, frequent respiratory infections and exposure to tobacco smoke (pre- or postnatal) are risk factors - as is antibiotic use during the first year of life, according to a recent study published in the March issue of the peer-reviewed medical journal *Pediatrics*.

The study evaluated antibiotic exposure in more than 250,000 infants, looking for a potential association between antibiotic use during infants' first 12 months and the development of asthma during their first 24 months. Results showed a small risk that increased with the number of antibiotic courses prescribed; the risk was highest in children treated with more than four courses during their first year. Findings were adjusted to exclude other potential factors that could have contributed to asthma onset, including birth weight, acute bronchitis, delivery method, socioeconomic status, gestational age and other variables. Even when considering these factors, an independent association between antibiotic use and asthma remained.

Of course, reducing the chances your child will develop asthma is just one reason to limit their exposure to antibiotics and other medications whenever possible, particularly when they're young. Excessive antibiotic use can reduce their effectiveness over time, meaning they're progressively less likely to work the more often they're prescribed. And along with over-the-counter and prescription medications, antibiotics come with a variety of potential side effects - some that are relatively minor, but others that can be life-threatening. To learn more about antibiotic resistance, talk to your doctor and visit www.cdc.gov/resistance.

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