Children Allergies, Air Pollution & Learning Disabilities

Everyone knows that air pollution causes respiratory problems in children and adults. Problems like asthma, COPD, and a susceptibility to respiratory infections. But did you also know that air pollution can contribute to allergies? No, I'm not just talking about sneeze attacks, but actual food, skin, and other childhood allergies that seem to be so prevalent in our culture.

Have you noticed that childhood allergies seem to be on the rise? Here are some statistics that might shock you:

- Peanut allergy doubled in children over a five-year period (1997-2002).
- More than 12 million Americans have food allergies. That's one in 25, or 4 percent of the population.
- The incidence of food allergy is highest in young children - one in 17 among those under age 3
- About 3 million children in the U.S. have food allergies.
- About 27% of children who have a food allergy also have eczema or a skin allergy.

Why the sudden upsurge in allergies for children? Air pollution. The environmental effects of air pollution on fetus and infants, ones most susceptible due to their rapid growth, cannot be measured. It is only later that the damage appears. Beyond second-hand smoke, things like smog, high pollen count, aerosoled chemicals, and even high levels of VOCs (volatile organic compounds) can cause significant damage to growing bodies.

A real life example of this occurred in my own family. My family lives in a large town known for its smog, high pollen count, and industrial areas. Not an ideal place to have and raise children. But, like many families, we must live where the jobs are. My little brother was born at the height of the town's prosperity- and smog issue. The effects and differences between us have been profound. While I do have sinus issues due to the pollution, my brother had many more effects. His skin is ultra-sensitive. If he so much as brushes against a tree or plant, he breaks out. Even scratching an itch turns into welts that last for hours. He lives a life of constant itchiness that is impossible to scratch away. Thankfully, as he grew, the effects lessened somewhat. However, there were more permanent effects. Because of his constant sinus and bronchial infections, he has an issue with polyps growing in his sinus cavities, which can only be removed surgically every few years. He also has a high risk of pneumonia; exacerbated by environmental conditions he has difficulty avoiding.

Though the effects could have been much worse, he only has to use an inhaler off and on and must treat his nose twice a day, the damage is irreversible. All this because air pollution is not a priority. Just think how much better our children’s lives would be, and
how much healthier the adults they grow into will be, if air pollution becomes a thing of the past.

My brother also had issues with ADHD. One thing that you may not know is that air pollution and allergies also have a connection with learning disabilities. There’s a substantial amount of evidence to support the fact that many learning disabled children are born to mothers with a history of allergies. Allergies can affect many parts of the body- including the brain. When an allergy affects the brain, it can cause a child to have difficulties concentrating, focusing and paying attention to tasks.

15 to 20 percent of the world population has some type of allergy. A child can be allergic to almost anything so check for all forms of allergies. Food is one of the primary causes of allergic reactions. If a child eats food they are allergic to, the body will not run properly and that may affect their behavior. Everyone has different sensitivities to allergens so just one child is not affected that way does not mean another will not be. Many of the symptoms of allergies are blamed on ADHD.

That does not mean that ADHD will go away if allergies are treated properly, but the important thing to remember is that your goal is to have your child's body running at its best so that whatever disabilities they do have will lessen in severity and they will be better able to cope with them. Don't add insult to injury by ignoring issues that you can help with. Have your child tested for allergies and make sure their living environment is as free of allergens and pollution as possible. That way your child can live a healthier, more productive life.