

Tiny specks pose big threat



Erin Harrel
of Cape Coral is
the mother of
three children.

I doubt anyone likes mold and dust, but these tiny things play a major role in our lives. Our middle daughter, Riley, suffers from asthma.

At first, we thought Riley was just prone to colds. When she was 2, we started to notice a constant phlegm-laden cough. We took her to our pediatrician, Dr. Marty McKenna, and she was treated with a round of antibiotics. She continued on antibiotics every other month or so. My husband and I became very concerned that a greater problem might exist.

Suspecting asthma or allergies, our



Photo special to Parents & Child

Allergies don't keep Sicily, Erin's niece, from having fun in the sun with her brother Enzo.

pediatrician asked us to monitor when Riley seemed to have the worst coughing and wheezing attacks. We found it was worse when she was outside (especially places such as her Aunt Casey's farm). Of course, that has to be one of her favorite places to

go! So, we discussed this with our pediatrician. We wanted to test her for allergies.

"If she is allergic to something out on the farm," he replied, "are you going to quit taking her to her Aunt's house? If she is allergic to ➤➤

a mother's view

something outside, are you going to keep her inside all of the time while her siblings frolic on the playground? If her breathing difficulties and cold symptoms are stimulated by an allergen, are you willing to make major lifestyle changes to accommodate her?"

Well, of course we would — or so we thought!

The reality was some changes just weren't realistic. We started using a home breathing machine, a nebulizer, which allows her to breathe medicine directly to her lungs. Still, her cold-like symptoms continued, and Dr. McKenna recommended a pediatric pulmonologist or allergist, Dr.

Oscar Alea. Dr. Alea started Riley on a regimen of allergy and asthma products: Flonase, Advair and Singulair.


It broke my heart to have her on all of the meds. I have always tried to follow a more natural route, and even though I saw a change for the better, I was determined to keep her off meds. So, doing what I thought was

best (mind you, I have absolutely no medical background), three months after she started the meds, I took her off all three of them. That was a mistake I'll never repeat. Riley came down with her worst bout of asthma two months later. She missed a week of school and had to be on her nebulizer every three hours.

Dr. Alea eased my concerns (after very politely reprimanding me) about all the meds, assuring me that I was doing much more significant damage forcing her to struggle to breathe all of the time. He told me she could already have tissue damage in her lungs — that was scary! He equated taking the medicines to spitting in the ocean. He said, "They play a huge role in prevention but have little effect on her long-term health."

This past summer, we had Riley tested for allergies and found out her highest allergens are mold, dust mites, nuts and several of Florida's native trees.

I've researched and talked to everyone I know to find out how to best help Riley. I have found she is lucky compared to many children. My niece, Sicily, was recently tested and found to be allergic to dairy proteins (i.e. milk, cheese, yogurt). Her parents, Brendan and Kristi Shaw, have found very creative ways to incorporate Sicily's favorite food, cheese, without the dairy. At a whole foods store, they found rice- and tofu-based cheeses.

We will continue to monitor Riley's asthma and allergies, and we're learning new ways to cope with this very common illness — the most common chronic disorder among children today. Cleaning house frequently and thoroughly has been one huge chore that certainly pays off in our case. We are just glad we have found a regimen that seems to keep our daughter healthy. 

Online

Helpful asthma-related sites

- lungusa.org The American Lung Association has a children's page.
- asthma.com General information by GlaxoSmithKline, a drug company that makes respiratory medicines.
- allergyasthmamatch.com Allergy and asthma products, from bedding to air cleaners.

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