

**CERTIFIED ALLERGY
&
ASTHMA CONSULTANTS**

Patient Handbook



PATIENT HANDBOOK
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WELCOME TO OUR PRACTICE

We are happy that you have chosen Certified Allergy & Asthma Consultants for your allergy and asthma care. Since 1965 we have strived to provide quality healthcare for patients with asthma and other allergic diseases. This handbook has been prepared to acquaint you with our office staff, policies and services.

The physicians at Certified Allergy & Asthma Consultants operate as a single private group practice to ensure your uninterrupted care. We have several offices throughout the Capital District for your convenience of care.

Our main office is located at:

8 Southwoods Boulevard , Albany, New York (in the Corporate Woods office park).

Our satellite offices are at:

7 Emma Lane, Clifton Park, New York,

2231 Burdett Avenue, Troy, New York,

92 East Avenue, Saratoga, New York

2125 River Road, Schenectady, New York

If you wish to schedule an appointment, please call:

Albany Office.....(518) 434-1446

Clifton Park Office.....(518) 383-0001

Saratoga Office.....(518) 886-7675

Schenectady Office.....(518) 374-2266

Troy Office.....(518) 272-1515

If you are inquiring about billing or need assistance with insurance information, please call our Business Office at (518) 434-1456.

We respect the confidence that you have placed in us. We regard the doctor/patient relationship as sacred – requiring trust, mutual respect and confidentiality. The content of your medical record remains confidential and will be released only upon your written authorization. Our office staff is employed to assist us in the delivery of excellent care in the areas of allergy and asthma. We are proud of them and the work they do. Should you, at any time, have comments on the care given by our physicians or staff, please let us hear from you. We hope that this handbook will be of help to you. If you have any further questions, we will do our best to answer them.

WHAT IS AN ALLERGY?

An allergy is an abnormal reaction to substances ordinarily harmless to most other people. These may be taken into the body by being inhaled through the nose and lungs, by being swallowed, or by contact with the skin. Such sensitizing substances are called allergens. Pollens, molds, house dust mites, animal danders (skin shed by dogs, cats, horses, etc.) and saliva, feathers (as in feather pillows), chemicals used in industry, some foods and medicines and insect venom (bee stings) are some of the common allergens.

These allergens may trigger an allergic reaction in a sensitized individual. Among the chief allergic reactions are: asthma, hay fever, perennial rhinitis (year-round hay fever), urticaria and angioedema (hives and swelling), atopic dermatitis (eczema), contact dermatitis such as poison ivy, food allergy and hymenoptera sensitivity (severe reactions to stinging insects).

WHO DEVELOPS ALLERGIES?

It is estimated that 20% of the U.S. population suffers from some form of allergy. The tendency to become sensitized or allergic is usually genetically inherited. In addition, the development of allergies is dependent upon the quantity of a given allergen to which an individual is exposed and the duration of the exposure. The severity of allergic symptoms is dependent upon the degree of sensitization, the type of allergen to which an individual is exposed and the amount of the exposure. An individual may have a single allergic problem or several simultaneously. The tendency to develop new allergies throughout a lifetime is common. Allergic symptoms may involve many different parts of your body, either individually or simultaneously (such as skin, nose and/or lungs).

HOW ARE ALLERGIES TREATED?

There are no quick and easy answers to treating allergic diseases. Identification of the offending allergen is of prime importance so that it can be avoided. Medications help to control the symptoms of allergies, but do not actually decrease the sensitivity to a given allergen. Immunotherapy (allergy injections) decreases the severity of an allergy by actually desensitizing (decreasing the sensitivity) an individual to a given allergen.

Avoidance, medications and immunotherapy are used singly or in combination to control allergy symptoms. Patients with asthma must receive close monitoring and continuous care to optimize lung function, prevent asthma-related absences from work and school, and prevent emergency room visits and hospitalizations.

ALLERGY DIAGNOSIS AND TESTING

Your physician may request testing to further evaluate your particular allergic problems. Tests may include some or all of the following, depending upon your individual problem:

Tests performed in our office:

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- **Skin tests:** Prick and intradermal skin tests are performed to determine if an individual is sensitized to substances (allergens) which can cause allergic reactions. These tests are done on the arms and occasionally on the back. Patients who require skin testing may receive up to 75 prick tests and up to 60 intradermal tests. Skin tests may be performed in one or more office visits.
 - **Pulmonary function tests (PFT):** This test is performed for initial evaluation of patients with asthma or other breathing difficulties and is subsequently performed to monitor asthma control.
 - **Exhaled Nitric Oxide test:** This test measure the amount of inflammation in the lungs and is often performed on patients with asthma.
 - **Tympanometry:** A test that assesses the status of the middle ear.
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Tests performed at other facilities:

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- **Serum IgE:** A blood test that measures allergic antibody level.
 - **RAST tests:** Blood tests that determine specific allergic antibody levels.
 - **Other blood tests:** These may include a complete blood count, biochemistry profile, complement levels, immunoglobulin levels and occasionally other tests.
 - **X-rays:** Chest x-rays, sinus x-rays and sinus CT scans may be requested for patients with lung or chronic sinus problems.
 - **Methacholine and exercise challenge tests:** These tests may be used in certain situations to determine whether asthma may be the cause of respiratory symptoms.
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SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE SKIN TESTING

When required, special instructions will be given to you by your physician or other staff members prior to any testing. Antihistamines (Allegra, Fexofenadine, Benadryl, Chlor-Trimeton, Claritin, Zyrtec, Loratadine, Cetirizine, Singular, Xyzal, Clarinex or Hydroxyzine, and many others) block skin test reactions and, therefore, must not be taken for at least 72 hours prior to skin testing. **Do not discontinue antihistamines if they are being used for control of hives and/or swelling.** Discontinuation of antihistamines in this circumstance may result in sudden exacerbation of hives and swelling. **Do not discontinue medications prescribed for asthma or other medical conditions without discussing this with one of our professional staff.** Discontinuation of asthma medications may result in breathing difficulties.

ALLERGY INJECTIONS

If it is determined that you require allergy injections, you and your allergist will discuss your individual program in detail. You may be receiving one or several injections at each office visit depending on your degree of sensitivity. Initially, it is recommended that allergy injections be received at least once weekly. After six months to one year the frequency of injections is typically reduced to every 2 weeks and then to every 4 weeks. The average immunotherapy (injection) program is four to five years in duration. Benefit, in the form of symptom relief, is typically noted after six months of immunotherapy.

Administering allergy injections may appear easy, but there is always a risk of an allergic reaction. For this reason, allergy injections must be administered by a medical professional in an appropriate medical office or clinic. The importance of receiving allergy injections in a medical facility where emergency care is available cannot be overstressed. Most allergic reactions to injections occur within 30 minutes of receiving the injection. **As a precaution, you will be required to wait 30 minutes after receiving your injection before leaving the office.**

REORDERING ALLERGY EXTRACT

If you receive injections at one of our offices, your extract will be available when it is needed. If you receive your injections elsewhere, the physician who is responsible for administering your injections should reorder your extract using the reorder form that is included with all extract vials. The reorder form provides us with information needed to make appropriate changes. Your physician should anticipate the need for new extract and allow one month for your reorder to be filled.

INJECTION ROOM

Injections are given on a first-come/first-serve basis. No appointment is needed. We have found that this actually reduces the waiting period for our patients. You will not see your physician when coming in for an allergy injection unless you have a scheduled appointment. Our extended hours for injections allow you great flexibility and the satisfaction of having an injection program which interferes very little with your daily activities.

RE-EVALUATION VISITS

Seeing your physician periodically to check on your progress is extremely important to monitor medications, control of symptoms and immunotherapy dosages and schedules to optimize results. You will be asked to make re-evaluation visits as your physician feels they are necessary.

APPOINTMENTS

We see patients by appointment only and are able to schedule routine re-evaluation appointments up to six months in advance. For patients who need to be re-evaluated in six months or less, the appointment may be scheduled when checking out. For patients who need to be re-evaluated more than six months after the previous evaluation, a card notifying you that an appointment should be scheduled will be mailed to you six

months before the next visit is due. Please call to schedule your appointment when you receive your reminder card to ensure that an appointment will be available. You will be mailed an appointment reminder card before your visit and we will confirm your appointment by telephone 4 days prior to your visit.

Of course, **call us if you are having problems between regularly scheduled re-evaluation visits. If you are having allergy or asthma related problems and it is essential that you be seen on short notice, you may be offered an appointment with our Physician's Assistant. We may also ask you to take an appointment in another of our Capital District locations. This may allow us to treat you on a more timely basis.** Patients who wish to be seen specifically by a physician will be accommodated as scheduling permits. If you have a problem that is not allergy or asthma related, you should see your primary care physician.

CANCELING AN APPOINTMENT

Please let us know when you cannot keep a scheduled appointment so that another patient can be scheduled. Kindly contact our office as soon as you know that you will be unable to make your appointment but no later than 2 working days before the appointment is scheduled. Remember that our physicians are scheduled to see only you during that appointment time. We reserve the right to charge for appointments cancelled or broken without 24-hour notice. **Patients who no-show (fail to keep or cancel their appointment) may be subject to discharge from our care. Future appointments may not be scheduled.**

THE TREATMENT OF MINORS

The diagnosis and subsequent treatment of allergies and asthma is based upon an extensive health and environmental history, physical examination and diagnostic testing. A treatment plan will be developed that typically includes intensive education about allergen avoidance through environmental modification, a medication regimen with rationale for use and possible side effects, and techniques to monitor symptom control. In addition, immunotherapy may be discussed. The often complex nature of treating allergies and asthma necessitates that minors, regardless of age, be accompanied by a parent, guardian or other responsible adult that can answer questions about the patient's health history for office visits and allergy injections.

EMERGENCIES

One of our providers is always available for allergy and asthma emergencies. During office hours please call our office, identify yourself, indicate that the call is an emergency and relay the information to the receptionist and we will respond promptly. After office hours and on the weekends, the telephone is answered by our answering service who will relay your message to the professional on call for allergy and asthma problems. If you elect to go to a hospital emergency room, the attending physician may contact us if he/she feels it is necessary. Please request that a copy of the medical record be sent to our office. If you should require hospitalization, our physicians have admitting privileges at Albany Medical Center. We also have consulting privileges at Samaritan Hospital.

TELEPHONE CALLS

If you have an allergy related medical problem between appointments and need help, call us. Please state the reason for the call to the receptionist. The receptionist will refer your call to the appropriate health professional. In an effort to decrease office waiting time and spend more time with patients, routine phone discussions with a provider are not held during office hours. Extraordinary situations are handled promptly by a provider. Many minor problems can be handled over the telephone by our staff of experienced nurses. If required, information is conveyed to the physician, or physicians' assistant to facilitate a quick response to your questions and problems. It is generally not our policy to treat patients or prescribe medications over the phone.

PRESCRIPTIONS

It is not our policy to prescribe new medications over the telephone. Long-term medication refills may be handled over the telephone if you are under our active care. Please have available the names of the medications needed, the dosages used, and your pharmacy telephone number. If you are given samples to try, be sure to write down the name of the medication that works best. **Please allow one full working day for your telephoned prescription to be available.** We must confirm the accuracy of the prescriptions requested for your safety. **Please anticipate your prescription needs for weekends and holidays and contact us for refills during regular office hours.**

MEDICAL RECORDS

We require ten working days to process your request for medical records. A signed authorization for the release of your records along with the name and address of the individual to whom they should be mailed must be included with the request.

FEES AND INSURANCE

Our fees reflect the nature and complexity of the problem involved, the cost of providing care, the time spent with the provider, and the cost of any diagnostic studies performed.

Certified Allergy & Asthma Consultants participates in many insurance plans. At the time of your initial visit you, will be asked to sign a standard assignment of benefits and authorization to release medical information. This assignment allows us to release medical information to your insurance company and provides for direct payment of benefits to Certified Allergy & Asthma Consultants.

Your insurance carrier may require a referral from your primary care physician for all specialist services. Please bring this referral with you at the time of your initial visit to our office and at subsequent visits should a previous referral have expired. If you do not have a valid referral, you will be required to sign a waiver, which makes you responsible for payment.

At the end of each office visit, you will be given an “Encounter Form” which indicates the charges incurred for **that** visit. If we participate in your insurance plan, your charge will automatically be billed to your insurance company. Please visit our website at www.certifiedallergy.com for a current list of participating plans. Some insurance companies require a patient co-payment or that a patient pay a percentage of the total charges incurred for that office visit. **You are responsible for the appropriate payment or co-payment at the time of each office visit.**

In many instances, some services may not be fully covered by your insurance plan. After processing your insurance claim, your insurance company will notify you of the amount that was paid to Certified Allergy & Asthma Consultants. **It is your responsibility to pay the balance.**

If you do not have insurance coverage or we do not participate in your insurance plan, we ask that you **be prepared to pay for services at the time of your visit.** If unusual circumstances should make it difficult for you to pay your bill, please contact our business office staff to discuss the matter and to make financial arrangements. Except when hardship warrants otherwise, accounts past due will be referred to our collection agency. For answers to questions concerning fees and insurance, please contact our business office at 434-1456. You will find us understanding and cooperative.
