

PRESS RELEASE

Obese children have up to double the risk of having asthma

Barcelona/Zurich, 14 October 2011 – Asthma is considered one of the main causes of school absenteeism and its prevalence has risen in the last decades. Overweight children have been shown to have double the frequency of asthma than that of non-obese children.

Poor diet and insufficient exercise are associated with a series of cardiovascular risks and other chronic diseases, but some studies point out that asthma could be added to that list since the association between asthma and obesity comes from some common factors, as it is being discussed during the **2nd EAACI Pediatric Allergy and Asthma Meeting (PAAM 2011)** that is taking place in Barcelona at the International Convention Centre (CCIB), from 13 to 15 October.

“Does asthma lead to obesity, or are they related to other common factors? A recent explanation that is being investigated is the over production of cytokines (substances with inflammatory effect) due to a variety of stimuli that may lead to the development of asthma”, explains Dr Angel Mazon, PAAM 2011 Co-Chair and EAACI Pediatric Section Board Member. “Thanks to these findings, physicians calculate that the frequency of asthma in obese children can be up-to-double that of non-obese kids”.

According to the experts, nutritional status demonstrates a positive influence in the fight against asthma. “Indeed, many studies show a protective effect of the Mediterranean diet against asthma. The Mediterranean diet, rich in fruits, vegetables, fish and fresh foods, as opposed to fast food, has shown protection in the case of cardiovascular disease and cancer, but it must be thoroughly assessed for asthma”, states Antonella Muraro, PAAM 2011 Co-Chair and EAACI Treasurer.

Asthma and allergy often go hand-in-hand and the latter has a dual role in asthma development. One of the most obvious roles is as a trigger of asthmatic attacks, such as when a child is exposed to large amounts of allergen, e.g. when playing with a cat, places full of dust or in fields of grass. The second role, not so obvious but probably more important, is the induction of chronic inflammation of the airways in children exposed to lesser amounts of allergen. For instance, a normal amount of dust at home will not develop acute evident symptoms, but will be able to cause chronic inflammation, making the patient more susceptible to the effects of all kind of triggers.

Contrary to the vast opinion, sports are recommended for children with asthma and they should be encouraged to practice. “Sports have very beneficial effects on the cardiopulmonary system, and an enhanced respiratory capacity will be of much help in the case of asthmatic attacks. Indeed, the lack of exercise leads to lesser respiratory capacity and this to less exercise, creating a vicious cycle”.

Thanks to the detection of the influence of these triggers, clinical efforts are focused now on personalised therapies, as response to treatment is variable across patients. “The available treatments for asthma show a slow progress, as every new therapy must be thoroughly assessed before wider availability. All of them have advantages and limitations regarding efficacy and potential adverse effects”.

**About EAACI :**

EAACI - The European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology is a non-profit organisation active in the field of allergic and immunologic diseases such as asthma, rhinitis, eczema, occupational allergy, food and drug allergy and anaphylaxis. EAACI was founded in 1956 in Florence and has become the largest medical association in Europe in the field of allergy and clinical immunology. It includes over 6'800 members from 107 countries, as well as 41 National Allergy Societies.

Throughout 2011, EAACI will develop different activities to celebrate the 100th anniversary of immunotherapy in Allergy, which will aim at increasing the knowledge in this field among healthcare professionals, increase awareness in the general population, and finally, promote the availability of immunotherapy for allergic patients.

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