

# When it comes to asthma, there's no 'one size fits all' treatment

Did you know that under most circumstances, fever beneficial, reducing the severity of illness and shortening its length

Asthma may be a disease with one name. But experts say that unbeknownst to most people who have it, it is not just one disease, nor is there a "one-size-fits-all" treatment for it.

Rather, as detailed in a new 54-page set of guidelines developed by an expert panel, in the 13 years since the last guidelines were issued, tremendous progress has been made in understanding the causes and physiological effects of various kinds of asthma and the different approaches needed to treat them and minimise flare-ups in children and adults. The guidelines were published in December in the Journal Of Allergy And Clinical Immunology.

"In recent years, we've recognised that everyone's asthma is a little different, with different underlying mechanisms, and the paradigm for treating it has changed completely," said Dr Michael Wechsler, an asthma specialist at National Jewish Health in Denver.

Asthma is now recognised as a far more complex condition than experts realised in 1991 when the first comprehensive guidelines were issued. It is now considered a syndrome with many different characteristics, or phenotypes, that result from the interaction between a person's genetics and environment.

Also, though not discussed in detail in the updated guidelines, the newest treatment with what are known as biologics is heralding new forms of personalised therapy for patients with severe asthma that is not well-controlled by other, albeit cheaper, remedies. Biologics are drugs made from modified molecules from the cells of live organisms designed to target specific



disease pathways that culminate in asthma symptoms.

"The last 13 years have seen an explosion of new strategies, new concepts, new understanding of mechanism, new drugs and new treatments," Dr Wechsler said in an interview. "In just the last five years, five new drugs have been approved for treating asthma."

The new guidelines can be especially helpful for people being treated for asthma, mild or severe, that is now not adequately controlled. More than half of asthma patients are treated by primary care doctors, with referrals to specialists like pulmonologists or allergists when their condition is severe or

doesn't respond well to treatment, said Dr Michelle Cloutier, professor emerita at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine, who chaired the expert panel.

Asthma afflicts about 25 million people in the United States, including 5.5 million children. It is not an infection, although the body reacts as if an enemy had attacked it. Rather, asthma is a chronic respiratory disease in people whose airways become inflamed in response to various triggering substances or behaviours.

The new guidelines can be especially helpful for people being treated for asthma, mild or severe, that is now not adequately controlled.

## A new set of guidelines recognises complexity in interaction between a patient's genetics and environment

The inflamed airways swell and narrow and the muscles surrounding them tighten, causing a bronchospasm. Unless the bronchospasm is quickly reversed, it can become very difficult to breathe and result in hospitalisation or death.

Why snoring loudly could be linked to heart disease, hypertension or worse Health Why snoring loudly could be linked to heart disease, hypertension. Although people with asthma always have some degree of airway inflammation, they are particularly sensitive to certain factors that can make the inflammation much worse and result in laboured breathing. Thus, some people with asthma have environmental allergies, for example, to pollen, animal dander, dust mites, rodents or cockroaches, that when encountered, can trigger an asthmatic attack. Others are sensitive to irritants in the air, like tobacco smoke, air pollutants,

or substances with strong odours. For example, Dr Wechsler said, "Even what is used to clean can be irritating to a person with asthma."

Researchers now recognise that the triggering event of an asthma attack can have different manifestations within the airways and therefore respond better to different treatments. As Dr Cloutier explained, in allergic asthma, inflammatory cells called eosinophils collect in the airways, but when a viral infection triggers the inflammation, cells called neutrophils are released, warranting a different treatment. The new guidelines highlight the value of a measurement called FENO that stands for frac-

tional exhaled nitric oxide, a biomarker described as useful in correctly diagnosing and adequately treating asthma in different patients. For children aged five and older, a nitric oxide measurement can help confirm the diagnosis of asthma and evaluate the effectiveness of treatment. Even strong emotions, like fear, anger, excitement or laughter, and sudden changes in the weather are problems for some people with asthma. Although the guidelines do not provide hard-and-fast rules, they offer valuable treatment suggestions when currently used remedies do not result in the best relief possible.

By Jane Brody © The New York Times



## 'We are a misunderstood place': New MP Carrie Tan on Yishun, politics and her tattoos

SINGAPORE: Nee Soon GRC Member of Parliament Carrie Tan was surprised to be invited in 2018 for tea sessions with the People's Action Party (PAP) - a precursor to becoming a candidate for the party.

The founder of Daughters of Tomorrow (DOT), a non-governmental organisation that helps lower-income women, felt that she had been quite critical of the Government. But she thought this would be a good opportunity to speak out for the underprivileged to the ruling party.

"I feel like I need to help them understand certain things that I'm seeing, and certain issues that they may not have had the opportunity to deep dive into," she said. "Every single tea session for me was an advocacy moment."

Along the way, she met different ministers and MPs, and became convinced of "their conviction and their intention to really do good by Singaporeans", she said.

MP Carrie Tan 2021 Nee Soon GRC

One deciding factor was that when she spoke her mind, she felt that people listened.

"I think one of the key considerations I had was ... Do I have to be not myself? Do I have to kind



of fit into a certain box in order to get onto this process? I was a bit sceptical," she said.

"But it was very encouraging, because every step of the way, I was very honest. I shared my views, and people listened, and they were receptive to what I had to share ... (and) I guess in the end, I felt like: Can lah!"

She said that in her years of trying to solve the issue of poverty, she had seen that the challenges low-income families face are "multi-faceted".

"Being in politics gives me a wider platform to take a more holistic approach to looking at some of the things that society needs to probably shift or change in order to provide better scaffolding and stepping stones for the poor

among us," she said.

Seven months on from the 2020 General Election, the Nee Soon South representative seemed quite at home at a Yishun Ring Road coffee shop having crispy prata and a barley drink.

Sitting along a busy thoroughfare flanked by two coffee shops, the interview was interrupted a few times by residents saying "hi" to their MP.

When Yishun's reputation as a magnet for cat killers, murders, petty crime and bad news in general is brought up, she bristled: "I love Yishun, I love the people here. We are a misunderstood place, okay."

"We have the most charming, loveliest people. So many dogooders," she effused, gesturing

at the people having their dinner or drinks.

"You see the coffee shop here. They will like from here shout across to there. It's very kampong, I love it."

She admits that there are residents who compare her to former MP Lee Bee Wah, who was MP there for 14 years, and was affectionately known as "Hua Jie" or "Sister Flower" among Yishun residents.

"I think there's only natural and normal. There are different kinds of residents, some of them will compare and say: Hey, you know, last time Dr Lee used to do this this, that that that ... I can learn from that," she said.

"Then there'll be other residents who say: Don't worry, just be yourself. We support you, just to do what you do."

The little changes that Ms Tan has started to make can be seen in a banner with bright pink lettering advertising her weekly house visits. It reads "Bringing care to you on ..." followed by the days and times, and the hashtag #Carriecares.

At her division, Nee Soon South, she has changed the language of the reminder notices for residents that fall into arrears for conservancy charges. —CNA

## Australian court upholds landmark suit against Johnson & Johnson



SYDNEY: An Australian court upheld a landmark class-action lawsuit against Johnson & Johnson for "negligent" marketing of pelvic mesh implants paving the way for thousands of women to receive compensation in a costly setback for the US pharma giant.

Johnson & Johnson had appealed the 2019 ruling that found the company guilty of "negligent" marketing and "deceptive conduct" while supplying thousands of pelvic meshes in Australia. Victims said the mesh - designed to support weakened muscles holding up the pelvic organs - had caused disastrous side-effects including incontinence, infections and chronic pain. "The risks were known, not insignificant, and on the respondents' own admission, could cause significant and serious harm," the judge said in the initial ruling.

A three-judge panel at the federal court dismissed the appeal on Friday, a decision that "confirmed that these women are entitled to be compensated for the losses and the life-altering complications that they have suffered as a result of these implants", said Rebecca Jancasukas, a lawyer for the claimants.

Shine Lawyers, which led the class action suit, said it would now vigorously pursue compensation claims possibly amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars. The three women involved in the 2019 suit were awarded compensation ranging from A\$556,000 to A\$1.28 million (US\$430,000 to US\$1 million). The remaining members of the class action will now bring their own individual claims to court. —CNA

## Singapore couple runs one of fewer than 10 tie ateliers in the world



As a university student, Gerald Shen was finicky about his sartorial choices. When he wanted to make pocket squares, he asked then-girlfriend Diana Chan, a crafts aficionado, to sew one with some of the vintage fabrics they had bought from Japan.

The final product turned out so well that they made more of the same from the remaining fabric and sold them online. The response was so encouraging that they opened Vanda Fine Clothing in 2011, a few months after Shen's graduation. Each product is crafted by hand in their Singapore workshop. Shen and Chan, now married, make classically-inspired ties, pocket squares and scarves. —CNA



## Are potato chips, ice cream as addictive as cigarettes?



Five years ago, a group of nutrition scientists studied what Americans eat and reached a striking conclusion: More than half of all the calories that the average American consumes comes from ultra-processed foods, which they defined as "industrial formulations" that combine large amounts of sugar, salt, oils, fats and other additives.

Highly processed foods continue to dominate the American diet, despite being linked to obesity, heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and other health problems. They are cheap and convenient, and engineered to taste good. They are aggressively marketed by the food industry.

But a growing number of scientists say another reason these foods are so heavily consumed is that for many people they are not just tempting but addictive, a notion that has sparked controversy among researchers. Recently, the American Journal Of Clinical Nutrition explored the science behind food addiction and whether ultra-processed foods might be contributing to overeating and obesity. It featured a debate be-

tween two of the leading experts on the subject, Ashley Gearhardt, associate professor in the psychology department at the University of Michigan, and Dr Johannes Hebebrand, head of the department of child and adolescent psychiatry, psychosomatics and psychotherapy at the University of Duisburg-Essen in Germany.

Dr Gearhardt, a clinical psychologist, helped develop the Yale Food Addiction Scale, a survey that is used to determine whether a person shows signs of addictive behaviour toward food. In one study involving more than 500 people, she and her colleagues found that certain foods were especially likely to elicit "addictive-like" eating behaviours, such as intense cravings, a loss of control, and an inability to cut back despite experiencing harmful consequences and a strong desire to stop eating them. At the top of the list were pizza, chocolate, potato chips, cookies, ice cream, French fries and cheeseburgers. Dr Gearhardt has found in her research.

By Anahad O'Connor © The New York Times

