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Led by Dr. Manav Segal, **Chestnut Hill Allergy & Asthma Associates LLC** offers lasting relief to patients dealing with food and seasonal allergies, asthma, and other life-altering issues. page 38



Also Inside:
Top doctors, thriving after divorce, and more



The practice's clinical team includes (clockwise from top) Drs. Manav Segal and Priya Mehta, both allergists and immunologists, and Maria Lauer, a certified family nurse practitioner.

RELIEVED

LED BY DR. MANAV SEGAL, **CHESTNUT HILL ALLERGY & ASTHMA ASSOCIATES LLC** OFFERS LASTING RELIEF TO PATIENTS DEALING WITH FOOD AND SEASONAL ALLERGIES, ASTHMA, AND OTHER LIFE-ALTERING ISSUES.

BY BILL DONAHUE | PHOTOS BY ALISON DUNLAP

At Chestnut Hill Allergy & Asthma Associates LLC, the clinical team led by Manav N. Segal, M.D., aims to help patients find relief from food and seasonal allergies, asthma, and other conditions. The ability to help patients reassert control over their lives is largely what convinced Dr. Segal to choose allergy and immunology as his area of specialty.

"I grew up in Arlington, Texas, and went to the University of Texas at San Antonio for medical school," says Dr. Segal, who is board certified by the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology and the American Board of Internal Medicine. "I did my residency at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia, and while I was at Jefferson, I spent time in allergy and immunology clinics. After that, I knew that's where I wanted to focus."

He appreciates the real-world results he sees from diagnosing and treating his patients. Whereas some areas of medicine pertain strictly to the management of chronic medical diseases, he likes the fact that allergy and immunology enables him to "fix a lot of the problems people have."

"I also get to help patients across all age groups," he adds. "I get to see kids grow up and then treat them as adults. It's not uncommon for me to treat an entire family."

Breakthrough Treatment for Food Allergies

Food allergies represent one of the fastest-growing aspects of Dr. Segal's practice. Food allergies, which can afflict people of all ages, can manifest in hives, itchy skin, rashes, or difficulty breathing, and often result in serious reactions that pose significant health risks.

If it seems that food allergies are on the rise, Dr. Segal cites a statistic from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: As many as one in 13 children now have an allergy to at least one food; common culprits include eggs, fish, milk, peanuts, shellfish, soy, tree nuts, wheat, and, most recently, sesame. Dr. Segal says emergency treatment for these allergic reactions is on the rise, too.

"Food allergies are a source of stress and anxiety for a lot of families," he adds. "Food is a big part of our culture; meals are supposed to be social events that bring us together, but for individuals with food allergies, what should be fun and communal becomes exclusionary and even potentially dangerous. You also see kids being bullied in school because of it."

In 2016, Dr. Segal became one of the first physicians in the country to offer oral immunotherapy, also known as OIT. OIT essentially "retrains" the immune system to tolerate specific food allergens, meaning patients no longer have to live with the fear of accidental ingestion.

"It was frustrating for me as a doctor to make a diagnosis that a child is allergic to milk, and my best advice was for them to come back in a year and see if it's any better," he says. "OIT can be life changing for patients and their families. It's also incredibly rewarding for me personally. It's one thing to make a diagnosis, but it's another thing to say, 'This can solve your problem.'"



We combine the most current treatment options with good old-fashioned personal care.”

— DR. MANAV SEGAL,
CHESTNUT HILL ALLERGY
& ASTHMA ASSOCIATES LLC

OIT has a success rate of 85 percent among patients of all ages, according to Dr. Segal, though it does require a significant commitment of a patient’s time; patients must come to the office for treatment every one to two weeks for 10 to 12 months. Dr. Segal says OIT patients can build up a tolerance to specific food allergens during that timeframe.

The pioneering therapy has made Chestnut Hill Allergy & Asthma Associates a destination for patients near and far. Patients come from across Pennsylvania, as well as from Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and the District of Columbia. With few exceptions, good candidates include anyone with an immunoglobulin E-mediated allergy caused by consuming or otherwise coming into contact with certain foods.

“Just the awareness that there is another treatment option is a big deal,” he adds. “People don’t have to accept avoidance as the only option. Even if a patient chooses not to go through with OIT, it’s liberating and empowering knowing they have options.”

Tackling Seasonal Allergies

Sneezing, coughing, and watery eyes represent a few of the telltale signs of allergy season in the Philadelphia area. While severe cases could put someone’s health at risk, even minor allergies can significantly diminish an individual’s quality of life.

Typically, allergy season in Pennsylvania begins in early spring and can last until the first freeze of winter. Climate change, however, has begun to change the calculus. Warmer and wetter conditions mean that pollen season tends to start earlier, last longer, and result in more severe allergies.

“We’re seeing people who have never had pollen allergies now experiencing symptoms,” he adds. “People are having to take allergy medication as early as mid-February

to get ahead of the spring season. Some people with eye and nose inflammation are seeing inflammation in their lower airways. In other words, allergies aren’t just a nuisance; they can also affect a person’s breathing.”

Maintaining Independence

In addition to Dr. Segal, the practice has two other seasoned clinicians: Priya Mehta, M.D., an allergist and immunologist who treats allergies, asthma, and eczema in adults and children; and Maria Lauer, CRNP, a certified family nurse practitioner who has a special interest in pediatrics.

“It’s uncommon to find an independent medical practice like ours,” Dr. Segal says. “From 2010 to 2018, I was completely on my own, but four years ago we brought on Maria, and in 2021 we brought on Dr. Mehta. Most doctors are affiliated with large institutions, and the doctors change frequently in organizations of that size. Here, you’re always going to see one of the three of us. Most patients find that very reassuring.”

The practice has evolved in other ways, too. Since its founding in Chestnut Hill, the practice has relocated to nearby Wyndmoor and opened a second location in Philadelphia’s Rittenhouse neighborhood. Dr. Segal anticipates more growth on the horizon, enabling him and his staff to offer relief to more patients from the Main Line and surrounding areas.

“I’m happy to say the practice continues to grow,” he says. “What makes us stand out is the way we combine the most current treatment options with good old-fashioned personal care. People come here because they are confident they will receive the highest level of quality care, whether they visit our Center City location or stop in just around the corner in Wyndmoor.” ■

HOW TO MANAGE SEASONAL ALLERGIES

Seasonal allergies affect more people each year, driven in part by changes in climate. The best offense is a good defense, complete with strategies to prevent and manage allergy symptoms. While avoidance of allergens is key, Dr. Manav Segal offers practical strategies:

- ➔ Know when your allergy season is. Tree pollen season for the Philadelphia region runs March through April.
- ➔ Stay indoors when tree pollen peaks in the early morning.
- ➔ Stay indoors on hot, windy days when pollen levels tend to be higher.
- ➔ Wear eye protection when biking.
- ➔ Keep windows closed when driving.
- ➔ Remove and wash clothes that have been worn outside.
- ➔ Shower to rinse pollen from the skin and hair.

Prescription and over-the-counter medications can help, though medications should be used only as directed by prescribing information or as directed by a physician. More serious allergy indications include asthma symptoms such as coughing, wheezing, and shortness of breath. When avoidance and OTC medications do not help, see an allergist.

Testing to determine the source of an allergy can help to avoid specific triggers and determine modes of treatment. For some, immunotherapy can be a good option. Guided by a board-certified allergist such as Dr. Segal, immunotherapy helps desensitize people to specific allergens by retraining the immune system to tolerate those allergens.

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