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Epidemiology

An overview of the association between allergy and cancer

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allergy • neoplasms • epidemiology • etiology

ABSTRACT

Numerous epidemiological studies have evaluated some aspect of the association between a history of allergy and cancer occurrence. In this article, an overview of the epidemiological evidence is presented with a discussion of a number of methodological issues important in this area of study. Literature searches were conducted using the MEDLINE database from 1966 through to August 2005 to identify articles that explored a personal history of allergic disorders as a risk factor for cancer. Although it is difficult to draw conclusions between allergy and cancer at many sites because of insufficient evidence or a lack of consistency both within and among studies completed to date, strong inverse associations have been reported for pancreatic cancer and glioma, whereas lung cancer was positively associated with asthma. Additional studies are needed to confirm these findings and to address the limitations of previous studies, including the validity and reliability of exposure measures and control for confounding. Further, large prospective studies using cancer incidence would be particularly useful, including studies using biological markers of allergic status to reduce potential misclassification and to confirm the results of previous studies based on self-report. There is also a need for further basic research to clarify a potential mechanism, should an association exist. © 2006 Wiley-Liss, Inc.

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