



Seasonal Allergies

Spring is here and allergy season is here. How do you control allergies so you can enjoy the outdoors?

- What are allergy symptoms?

Allergies can cause runny nose, headache, congestion, sneezing, watery eyes, itching eyes, sore throat, itchy throat, and itchy skin. Not all symptoms need to be present. Some kids get a crease across their nose from wiping – AKA the “allergic salute”. Others get purple circles under their eyes called allergic shiners.

For people with asthma, allergies are a known trigger. It’s especially important that people with wheezing tendencies keep up on allergy prevention and treatments.

Some will chronically mouth breathe, which can affect the growth and development of their jaw, lead to bad breath, and increase the risk of cavities.

- How to tell if symptoms are allergies or a cold?

An upper respiratory tract infection (AKA common cold) can also cause a runny nose, headache, congestion, sneezing, watery eyes, and sore throat. The difference is the cold symptoms tend to not last as long as allergies. There also could be a fever, body aches, and a general feeling of “not well” with viral infections.

Seasonal allergies tend to follow a seasonal pattern, so they can be easier to recognize than allergies to indoor allergens. It’s easy to track pollen counts online. If you realize that every day the counts for one type of tree or grass are elevated you have a symptom, that’s strong support that you’re allergic to that plant.

Of course, it’s possible to get a cold on top of your allergies, which adds to the confusion. If you are unsure, make an appointment with your doctor.

- How do I treat allergies?

It is best to treat before the symptoms get bad. Treatments include not only medicines, but also limiting exposure.

Limiting Exposure: Limiting exposure can help decrease symptoms. Remove clothing and shoes that have pollen on them when entering the house to keep pollen off the couch, beds, and carpet. It may help to wash your face/hands when coming inside after exposure, especially before bed. Keep the windows closed. Wash towels and sheets weekly in hot water. Vacuum and dust weekly. Consider cleaning home vents. Consider hard flooring in bedrooms instead of carpeting. Wash stuffed animals and other toys regularly and discourage allergic children from sleeping with them. Keep smoke away. Smoke is an airway irritant and can exacerbate allergy symptoms.

Pet issues: If someone's allergic to animals or suffers from yearlong symptoms, learn if your family pet is a problem. When you have pets that go outdoors and then into the home, bathe them regularly. Don't let pets on the couch or beds and keep them out of the bedrooms of allergic sufferers. If you know a family member is allergic to an animal, don't get a new pet of this type!

Nasal saline spray/rinse in the morning, before bed, and after exposure is helpful to decrease symptoms.

Medications

- Oral medications: Antihistamines work to block histamine in the body. Histamine causes the symptoms of allergies, so an antihistamine can help stop the symptoms. Some people respond well to one antihistamine but not others, so sometimes you must use trial and error to find the right one.

We prefer the 12-24 hour antihistamines simply because it's very difficult to cover well with a medicine that only lasts 4-6 hours, such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl) and they're less sedating. Long acting antihistamines include loratadine -Claritin (24 hour), fexofenadine- Allegra (12 hour for kids, 24 hour for teens and adults), levocetirizine-Xyzal (24 hour) and cetirizine- Zyrtec (24 hour).

If they make your child sleepy, giving antihistamines at bedtime instead of the morning might help.

- Nasal steroids: These are often the preferred treatment based on effectiveness and tolerability. Many are over the counter now; some examples are Flonase and Rhinocort.

If your child resists nose sprays: You can help your kids get used to nasal sprays with saline sprays. Saline is simply salt water, so it is okay to let your kids practice with these without risking any overdose of medication.

- Eye Drops: Eye drops can help alleviate eye symptoms. They are available over the counter. If over the counter drops fail, make an appointment to discuss if a prescription might work better. Most insurance companies don't cover prescription allergy eye drops well, so you might want to check your formulary before asking for a prescription. This is usually available on your insurance website after you log in.

If your child resists eye drops: Put the drop on the corner of the closed eye (nose side) and then have the child open his eyes to allow the drop to enter the eye.

- What if all of the above isn't helping to control allergies?

Call for an appointment with your doctor. There are prescription options available.