

Managing Those Annoying Allergies

Overview

An allergy is when your body overreacts to things known as allergens. This “overreaction” results in an immune response that can lead to certain annoying symptoms. The most common allergy symptoms include: runny nose, watery eyes, itchy nose, sneezing, stuffy nose, pressure in the nose and cheek, ear fullness and a popping sound, dark circles under the eyes, and/or hives. These symptoms are displeasing and discomforting.

What are the most common sources of allergies?

- Pollen from trees, grass, and weeds: Allergies in the spring are often due to tree pollen. Those occurring in the summer are often due to grass and weed pollen. Allergies in the fall are often due to ragweed.
- Mold: This is common in areas where water collects such as damp basements, rotting timber, and compost piles. This allergy is usually worse in wet, humid weather.
- Animal dander: This is usually from pets such as cats or dogs. Allergen exposure can occur through direct animal contact or from house dust that contains the dander.
- Dust: Tiny living creatures called dust mites are often found on mattresses, carpeting, and upholstered furniture.

What are some ways to avoid potential allergens?

Pollen

- Check your local TV or radio station for current pollen counts. If counts are high, start taking allergy medications before symptoms start.
- Close doors and/or windows when counts are high.

- Avoid early morning outdoor activities (this is when pollen counts are highest).
- Stay inside on dry windy days – this is when pollen is the highest.
- Remove clothing you have worn outside upon entering the house (you may also want to rinse your skin and hair).
- Don’t hang laundry outside since pollen can stick to the fabric.
- If you must do outside chores, wear a dust mask.
- Run the air conditioning in your house and/or car to keep inside air clean.
- Use allergy-grade air filters in your home.

Mold

- Avoid outdoor activities, such as raking leaves, which may disturb decaying matter.
- Lowering household humidity by a dehumidifier, removal of houseplants, and proper ventilation may also be helpful.

Animal Dander

- Use allergen-resistant bedding.
- Bathe pets frequently (once a week if tolerable).
- Do not allow pets on furniture or areas with carpet.

Dust

- Encase mattresses, box springs, and pillows in allergy-proof covers.
- Wash sheets and blankets in hot water (at least 130°F).
- Washable rugs are preferable to wall-to-wall carpeting.
- Vacuum carpets at least weekly.

Treatment

A variety of medications are available by prescription or over-the-counter (OTC) that can help with allergy symptoms. If a trial of OTC medications does not help or your symptoms are continual, severe, or particularly bothersome, see your health care provider for advice.

Medication	Actions	Comments
Antihistamines Loratadine (Claritin, Alavert) Cetirizine (Zyrtec) Diphenhydramine (Benadryl)	Helps reduce itching, sneezing, and runny nose	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Available with or without prescription• Loratadine and cetirizine are less likely to cause drowsiness than older antihistamines, although loratadine

Fexofenadine (Allegra)		<p>may cause less drowsiness than cetirizine</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prescription antihistamines such as fexofenadine may help if OTCs do not provide adequate relief.
<p>Decongestants</p> <p>Pseudoephedrine (Sudafed)</p> <p>Phenylephrine (Neo-Synephrine)</p> <p>Oxymetazoline (Afrin)</p>	Used short term to relieve nasal congestion (stuffy nose)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These drugs might worsen blood pressure or prostate problems so check with your physician before using if you have one of these conditions.
<p>Nasal Corticosteroids</p> <p>Fluticasone (Flonase)</p> <p>Budesonide (Rhinocort)</p> <p>Mometasone (Nasonex)</p>	Used long term to prevent and control allergic symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It may take 2-3 weeks before a full response is experienced. • Available only by prescription for particularly bothersome symptoms
<p>Leukotriene modifiers</p> <p>Montelukast (Singular)</p> <p>Zafirlukast (Accolate)</p>	Block the action of leukotrienes (chemicals in the body that produce an immune response)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often used alone or in combination with antihistamines • Available by prescription only
Cromolyn sodium	Stabilizes the cells that release histamine, a substance that causes allergic symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is best to use before the occurrence of allergic symptoms (histamine release). • Generally used 3-4 times a day to prevent symptoms

References

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