

Practical Tips for Surviving Spring Allergy Season

Springtime Suffering



Most of us welcome budding trees and blooming flowers in the spring. However, pollen in the springtime air can wreak havoc for those who have allergies. Airborne pollen from trees, grasses, flowers, and weeds can land in the eyes, nose, and lungs and affect sufferers with itchy watery eyes, a running nose, stuffy sinuses, coughing, and other breathing difficulties.

The best treatment for seasonal allergies, and allergies in general, is to avoid the allergens. (Allergens are substances that cause allergic reactions, such as a specific tree or plant, dust, mold, pet dander, etc.) Following are practical ways to ease seasonal suffering:

- Don't hang clothing outside to dry. Pollen can be trapped in clothing fibers. Instead, use a clothes dryer or indoor drying rack.
- Wash bed sheets in hot water weekly.
- Use allergy-proof covers for pillows, mattresses, and box springs.
- Be aware of the fluctuating pollen counts in your area. Avoid the outdoors during peak times between 5 a.m. and 10 a.m.
- Wear a filter mask when mowing or working outside.
- Use the air conditioner in both home and car. Keep windows closed.
- Shower and wash your hair before going to bed to wash off allergens that you may have encountered during the day.
- Keep pets off furniture and out of the bedroom, as they may have pollen in their coats.
- Carefully spring-clean your home. Clean out ducts and vents, replace heating and air condition filters, and replace vacuum bags.
- Check damp areas in your home for mold and mildew. Remove mold with non-toxic cleaners.

Treating with Medication

Consult your physician and/or pharmacist for over-the-counter antihistamines, decongestants, or nasal sprays to alleviate symptoms.

Antihistamines and decongestants are commonly used to treat allergy-related itchy and/or watery eyes, frequent sneezing, and an itchy or stuffed nose. Both medications are available in prescription and over-the-counter doses. These medications are relatively inexpensive, easy to take, and start working within a few hours. They can be taken on an as-needed basis. Some antihistamines can cause drowsiness, so use with caution.

Topical nasal steroids are available by prescription and are very effective at treating nasal allergies. These sprays need to be used daily for the best effect. Stop using sprays if irritation or bleeding is persistent or severe.

Check with your physician if allergy shots may desensitize you to the allergen. According to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, patients should visit an allergist or immunologist if symptoms persist, are recurrent, or interfere with quality of life and/or ability to function.

For more information, refer to the following websites:

<http://www.aaaai.org/springallergy/default.stm>

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/springtime-allergies/AA00060>