

Allergies: Controlling Your Symptoms

What is an allergy?

An allergy is when your body overreacts to a substance that does not cause problems for most people. These substances are called allergens. Some food and medicines can cause serious allergic reactions. Allergens in the air usually cause symptoms such as runny nose, watery eyes, itchiness, sneezing, and dark circles under your eyes.

What are the most common allergens?

- Tree pollen (late April and May), grass and weed pollen (late May to mid-July), and ragweed (late August until first frost)
- Mold, usually where water collects, such as shower curtains and damp basements. It can also be found in compost piles and leaf litter
- Dander, found in the skin, saliva, and urine of furry pets such as cats and dogs
- Dust and dust mites, usually found in bedding, mattresses, carpeting, and soft furniture

Can other things make my symptoms worse?

Yes. Aerosol sprays, humidity, tobacco smoke, air pollution, and wind can worsen symptoms.

How can I avoid allergens?

Shower or bathe before bedtime to remove pollen and other allergens from your hair and skin. Stay inside on dry, windy days. Keep windows and doors shut and use an air conditioner at home and in your car.

To reduce mold, remove houseplants and clean shower curtains, bathroom windows, and indoor trash cans often.

To reduce pet dander, use allergen-resistant bedding, and bathe your pet often. If your allergies are severe, you may need to give your pets away or keep them outside.

To reduce dust mites, remove drapes, feather pillows, soft furniture, nonwashable bedding, and soft toys. If possible, remove carpeting. Mop and vacuum regularly. Vacuum soft furniture, curtains and floors. Lower the humidity in your home with a dehumidifier.

What medicines can I take to help relieve my symptoms?

Ask your doctor which ones are best for you. Nasal sprays are most likely to be helpful and are available over the counter. Antihistamines help reduce sneezing, runny nose, and itchiness, but

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INFORMATION

From Your Family Doctor

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they can cause sleepiness. They are more useful if you use them before you are exposed to allergens. Decongestants help relieve a stuffy nose but should not be used for more than a few days. For severe allergies, your doctor may recommend some combination of nasal sprays, eye drops, and steroids.

Using salt water to rinse the inside of your nose can ease sinus symptoms. This is an easy and safe thing to try before you use any medicines. You can use this in addition to your allergy medicines.

What are allergy shots?

These shots contain small amounts of allergens. They are given on a schedule so that your body gets used to the allergens and no longer overreacts to them.

Allergy shots are only used when your allergy can be identified and when you cannot avoid allergens. It can take months to years to finish treatment, and you may need to have shots throughout your life.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and
Immunology
<https://www.aaaai.org>

National Library of Medicine
<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000813.htm>

Notes from your family doctor

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