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Seasonal Allergy Management

Seasonal allergies are a group of conditions that can cause sneezing, a stuffy or runny nose, and itchy eyes. Seasonal allergies are sometimes called "hay fever." Symptoms occur only at certain times of the year. Most seasonal allergies are caused by:

- Pollens from trees, grasses, or weeds
- Mold spores, which grow when the weather is humid, wet, or damp

Normally, people breathe in these substances without a problem. When a person has a seasonal allergy, his or her immune system acts as if the substance is harmful to the body. This causes symptoms.

Many people first get seasonal allergies when they are children or young adults. Seasonal allergies are lifelong, but symptoms can get better or worse over time. Seasonal allergies sometimes run in families.

Some people have symptoms like those of seasonal allergies, but their symptoms last all year. Year-round symptoms are usually caused by:

- Insects, such as dust mites and cockroaches
- Animals, such as cats and dogs
- Mold spores

Symptoms of Seasonal Allergies

- Stuffy nose, runny nose, or sneezing a lot
- Itchy or red eyes
- Sore throat, or itching of the throat or ears
- Waking up at night or trouble sleeping, which can lead to feeling tired during the day

Seasonal Allergy Testing

When diagnosing seasonal allergies, your doctor will ask about your symptoms and do an exam. He or she might order other tests, such as allergy skin testing, which can help determine what you are allergic to.

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Common Treatment Methods

People with seasonal allergies might use one or more of the following treatments to help reduce their symptoms:

- **Nose rinses:** Rinsing out the nose with salt water cleans the inside of the nose and gets rid of pollen in the nose. Different devices can be used to rinse the nose.
- **Steroid nose sprays:** Doctors often recommend these sprays first, because they are the best treatment for stuffy nose. Many of these sprays are available without a prescription (Flonase® or fluticasone for example). Steroid nose sprays work best if you use them every day, and it can take a few days for them to work fully. Steroid nose sprays are more effective than other allergy medicines for stuffy nose and post-nasal drip (which is when mucus runs down the back of your throat).
- **Antihistamines:** These medicines help stop itching, sneezing, and runny nose symptoms, but they don't treat stuffy nose as well as steroid nose sprays. These are available without a prescription and include medications like Zyrtec® (cetirizine), Allegra® (fexofenadine), and Claritin® (loratadine). Some antihistamines can make people feel tired.
- **Antihistamine eye drops:** These medicines are available without a prescription. They can help with eyes that feel itchy or gritty.
- **Decongestants:** These medicines can reduce stuffy nose symptoms and include medications like PseudoFed® (pseudoephedrine) and Afrin® (oxymetazoline). People with certain health problems, such as high blood pressure, should not take decongestants. Also, people should not use decongestant nose sprays or pills for more than 3 days in a row as this can make symptoms worse.

Feel free to talk with your doctor about the benefits and downsides of the different treatments. The right treatment for you will depend a lot on your symptoms and other health problems. We are able to dispense most of the common allergy medications cheaply in the office.

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Seasonal Allergy Prevention

Some people can prevent symptoms by starting medicine a week or two before the time of the year when they usually have seasonal allergy symptoms.

You can also help prevent symptoms by avoiding the things you are allergic to. For example, people who are allergic to pollen can:

- Stay inside during the times of the year when they have symptoms
- Keep car and house windows closed, and use air conditioning instead
- Take a shower before bed to rinse pollen off their hair and skin
- Wear a dust mask if they need to be outside

Seasonal Allergies and Pregnancy

Seasonal allergy symptoms can get worse, get better, or stay the same in pregnant women. While no drug can be considered 100% safe to use during pregnancy, the list below contains over-the-counter products generally felt to be safe for use during pregnancy. You should talk about your symptoms and need for treatment with your doctor if you consider using these during pregnancy.

- Diphenhydramine (Benadryl®)
- Loratidine (Claritin®)
- Cetirizine (Zyrtec®)
- Pseudoephedrine ([Sudafed®] after 1st trimester)
- Saline nasal drops or spray