

# Seasonal Allergies



Allergies are a short-term inflammation of the mucous membranes that line the nasal passages. "Hay fever," as the condition is commonly called, is caused by airborne pollens from trees, grasses, flowers, and weeds. Allergy season typically kicks off in the spring and fall when certain trees or grasses pollinate. When pollen season starts and how long it lasts varies throughout the country.

Allergies caused by pollen and other allergens affect 40 million Americans and cost more than \$1 billion in annual treatment costs.

## Causes

In allergies, airborne pollen from various seasonal plants—or, in some cases, spores from mold—enter the body through the eyes, nose, or throat, and trigger an allergic reaction. The symptoms of allergic reaction begin 5 to 10 minutes after allergen exposure, subside within an hour, and may return two to four hours later.

## Symptoms

Sneezing  
Runny nose  
Congestion  
Itchy, watery, red eyes

Itchy throat  
Dry cough  
Impaired sense of taste/smell  
Sleep disturbances

Itchy, watery eyes are often the first sign pollen season is underway. Or there may be an initial tickle on the roof of the mouth or in the back of the throat. Sneezing and a runny nose soon follow. Some allergy sufferers experience congestion, headaches, wheezing, and coughing.

Symptoms may interfere with sleep and result in irritability. Allergic conjunctivitis, a condition in which the inner eyelids and whites of eyes become inflamed, may occur as well.

## **Management & Treatment**

Know your triggers. You may think you know that pollen is causing your suffering, but other substances may be involved as well. More than two-thirds of spring allergy sufferers actually have year-round symptoms. An allergist can help you find the source of your suffering and stop it, not just treat the symptoms.

Work with your allergist to devise strategies to avoid your triggers:

- Monitor pollen and mold counts. Weather reports in newspapers and on radio and television often include this information during allergy seasons.
- Keep windows and doors shut at home and in your car during allergy season.
- Stay inside midday and during the afternoon, when pollen counts are highest.
- Take a shower, wash your hair and change your clothes after you've been working or playing outdoors.
- Wear a NIOSH-rated 95 filter mask when mowing the lawn or doing other chores outdoors, and take appropriate medication beforehand.

Your allergist may also recommend one or more medications to control symptoms. Some of the most widely recommended drugs are available without a prescription (over the counter); others, including some nose drops, require a prescription.

If you have a history of prior seasonal problems, allergists recommend starting medications to alleviate symptoms two weeks before they are expected to begin.