



patient education: Allergies

Do you start sneezing when you pet the dog or go for an outdoor stroll? Do your eyes water when you mow the lawn or use household cleaners? Does your nose redden at the first sign of spring? If so, you may suffer from allergies.

WHAT ARE ALLERGIES?

Allergies share many of the same symptoms as a cold or the flu. Symptoms may include a runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, and irritated, watery eyes. One way to tell if you have allergies is to notice when your symptoms occur. Allergies may only occur at specific times of the year, or when you are exposed to certain things such as dust or mold.

WHAT CAUSES ALLERGIES?

Allergens (substances that cause allergies) include:

- **Dust mites:** House dust contains mites. These mites live in bedding, mattresses, upholstered furniture, and carpets. They thrive during the summer and die in the winter. However, in a warm, humid house, they continue to thrive even in the coldest months.
- **Pollen:** Pollen triggers seasonal allergic rhinitis, also known as hay fever. Weeds, grasses, and trees are the largest producers of pollen. Some examples are ragweed, Bermuda grass, and oak trees.
- **Mold:** Mold is found almost everywhere, especially where water tends to collect in and around your home, such as on shower curtains and window moldings. This allergen is usually worse during humid or rainy weather.
- **Animals:** Household pets are the most common cause of allergic reactions. Allergies to animals may take two years or more to develop. Up to six months may be needed for symptoms to go away after removing the pet.

HOW CAN I AVOID ALLERGENS?

Dust avoidance:

- Wrap mattresses, box springs, and pillows in zippered, plastic, airtight, and dust-proof covers.
- Wash bed sheets and blankets weekly in hot water (at least 130°F).
- Vacuum regularly and dust with a damp cloth. The vacuum cleaner should be equipped with a special high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter.
- Remove carpeting and upholstered furniture from the bedroom.
- Replace horizontal blinds with vertical blinds or use washable curtains with shades.

Pollen and mold avoidance:

- Stay indoors in the morning and on dry, windy days. Mold spores and pollen counts may be higher during these times.
- When possible, use air conditioning in the car and home to keep cool rather than opening windows.
- Remove mold sources and keep humidity below 50%.
- Use a mix of water and chlorine bleach to kill mold.

Animal avoidance:

- Confine or remove pets. Grooming pets outdoors reduces your exposure to animal dander.
- Bathe your pets weekly, brush them more frequently, and keep them out of the bedroom.
- Use an air filter to help reduce pet dander.

WHAT MEDICATIONS CAN I TAKE TO HELP RELIEVE MY SYMPTOMS?

Often times, avoiding allergens will help to reduce or even prevent allergy symptoms. When this does not help, various medications are available to prevent or treat allergies.

Antihistamines

- Antihistamines work by blocking the effects of histamine, a substance that leads to allergy symptoms. These products help relieve sneezing, runny nose, and itchy or watery eyes. Antihistamines are not effective in relieving congestion or a stuffy nose. Some people who take antihistamines may experience side effects such as drowsiness and dry mouth. Some antihistamines cause fewer side effects than others. Antihistamines are available over-the-counter (OTC) and by prescription. Many of the listed OTC medications are sold under generic or retail pharmacy house brand names and may provide a savings.

Over-the-Counter (OTC)	Prescription Only
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Benadryl® (diphenhydramine) ● Chlor-Trimeton® (chlorpheniramine) ● Claritin® or Alavert® (loratadine) ● Tavist® (clemastine) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Allegra®* (fexofenadine) ● Astelin® (azelastine) ● Clarinex® (desloratadine) ● Zyrtec® (cetirizine)

*Also available as generic

Decongestants

- Decongestants relieve nasal congestion (stuffy nose). These products may cause irritability, nervousness, and sleeplessness in some people. Decongestants are available as tablets, capsules, liquids, nasal drops, and nasal sprays. OTC and prescription decongestant nose drops and sprays should not be used for more than three days. If used for longer periods, congestion may increase when the medication is stopped. People with high blood pressure should consult their doctor or pharmacist before using decongestants. Many of the listed OTC medications are sold under generic or retail pharmacy house brand names and may provide a savings.

Over-the Counter (OTC)#	Prescription Only
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Afrin® (oxymetazoline) ● Neo-Synephrine® (phenylephrine) ● Sudafed® (pseudoephedrine) ● Sudafed-PE® (phenylephrine) 	

Some OTC decongestants are available only behind the pharmacy counter

Antihistamine/Decongestant Combinations

- Antihistamine/decongestant combinations help relieve sneezing, runny and stuffy nose, and watery or itchy eyes. People may find a combination product to be more convenient. Many of the listed OTC medications are sold under retail pharmacy house brand names and may provide a savings.

Over-the Counter (OTC)#	Prescription Only
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Actifed® (triprilodine/pseudoephedrine) ● Chlor-Trimeton® (chlorpheniramine/ pseudoephedrine) ● Claritin D® (loratadine/ pseudoephedrine) ● Dimetapp® (brompheniramine/ pseudoephedrine) ● Drixoral® (dexbrompheniramine/ pseudoephedrine) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Allegra-D® (fexofenadine /pseudoephedrine) ● Clarinex-D® (desloratadine /pseudoephedrine) ● Poly-Histine® (pheniramine/ phenyltoloxamine/pyrilamine) ● Rondec®* (chlorpheniramine / phenylephrine) ● Zyrtec-D® (cetirizine/pseudoephedrine)

*Also available as generic

Products may be available only behind the pharmacy counter

Intranasal Steroids

- Nasal steroid sprays are anti-inflammatory drugs that help stop allergic reactions. They reduce swelling that causes symptoms such as stuffiness, sneezing and an itchy or runny nose. Nasal steroid sprays usually have few side effects but certain patients may experience dryness, bleeding, or a burning sensation in the nose. It may take up to 2 weeks to notice the full effects of these medications, but they can be very effective during periods of allergic reactions.

Over-the Counter (OTC)	Prescription Only
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Beconase AQ® (beclomethasone) ● Flonase®* (fluticasone) ● Nasacort AQ® (triamcinolone) ● Nasarel®* (flunisolide) ● Nasonex® (mometasone) ● Rhinocort Aqua® (budesonide)

*Also available as generic

Mast Cell Stabilizers

- Mast cell stabilizer sprays prevent the release of substances that cause the allergic reactions. Cromolyn is a mast cell stabilizer spray used to help prevent or treat allergy symptoms (sneezing, wheezing, runny nose, itching). Cromolyn is more helpful if used before exposure to allergens. It may take several weeks to notice the full effects of this medication. When cromolyn is used to treat chronic (long-term) allergic rhinitis, an antihistamine and/or a nasal decongestant may be used in combination with this medicine, especially during the first few weeks of treatment.

Over-the Counter (OTC)	Prescription Only
• Nasalcrom® (cromolyn)	

Leukotriene Blockers

- Leukotriene blockers work by blocking another substance in the body that triggers allergic reactions. This medication can help prevent or treat sneezing, runny nose, stuffy nose, and itchy nose. This class of medications is also used to treat asthma.

Over-the Counter (OTC)	Prescription Only
	• Singulair® (montelukast)

Please consult with your physician or pharmacist before taking any OTC medication. Talk to your physician if your symptoms do not improve or worsen within 2 to 3 days of self-treatment.

Reference:

1. American Academy of Family Physicians, Familydoctor.org Web site. Allergies: Things you can do to control your symptoms. Available at: <http://familydoctor.org/o83.xml>. Accessed March 29, 2007.
2. American Academy of Otolaryngology - Head and Neck Surgery Web site. Antihistamines, decongestants, and "cold remedies." Available at: <http://www.entnet.org/healthinfo/allergies/antihistamines.cfm>. Accessed March 29, 2007.
3. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Web site. Allergies. Available at: <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/publications/allergies.htm>. Accessed March 29, 2007.
4. US Food and Drug Administration Web site. Legal Requirements for the Sale and Purchase of Drug Products Containing Pseudoephedrine, Ephedrine, and Phenylpropanolamine. Available at: <http://www.fda.gov/cder/news/methamphetamine.htm>. Accessed March 29, 2007.