

ALLERGIES

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Why am I coughing, sneezing, and blowing my nose - especially in the Spring-time?

One out of four Americans have allergies, also known as allergic rhinitis. Allergies are either seasonal or perennial (ongoing).

Seasonal allergies occur at certain times of the year, such as the Spring, when certain allergens like tree and grass pollens are in the air. Perennial allergies occur on a continual basis when an individual is exposed to more common allergens, such as mold, dust mites or animals with fur.

Allergies often first develop in childhood or in the teenage years; however, they can also begin as an adult. It is important to note that a significant number of people who suffer from allergies, can also have asthma or chronic sinusitis. Usually, your doctor can diagnose whether or not you have allergies based on your symptoms.

What are common allergy symptoms? Itchy or watery eyes, sneezing, stuffy or runny nose, postnasal drainage, and sometimes a temporary loss of your sense of smell.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT ALLERGIES?

The most important factor is to identify WHAT causes ("triggers"), the allergy. Think about the following questions, and discuss them with your health care provider:

1. What physical changes (ie, a new rug or plant in your living room, a new deodorizer at work?) if any, have occurred at home or at work?
2. Have you recently moved or traveled?
3. Have you visited a friend or relative who owns a pet?
4. Can you identify any place, indoor or outdoor activity, or exposure that makes your allergy symptoms worse?

Triggers that may contribute to your allergies include irritating toxins and chemicals, pollen, dust, animals, hormones, drugs, tobacco smoke, cold air, and hairspray. Once the major triggers of your allergies are identified, try to avoid or minimize situations that expose you to them. These "triggers" are also called "allergens". Steps for allergen avoidance:

1. Remove carpeting.
2. Dust regularly around your house.
3. Use a small particle filter with your air conditioner to control exposure to outdoor pollens, molds, pets, and animals.

If your symptoms continue, then treatment with medications may be necessary. Your health care provider may recommend treatment with tablets or nasal antihistamines, decongestants, and possibly nasal steroids. Occasionally, diagnostic testing may be necessary, and we can refer you to the Center's Allergist for allergy sensitivity testing (which may include skin testing and/or blood tests).

If you think that you or someone you know may be suffering from allergies, the staff of the William F. Ryan Community Health Network can help you and your family determine if you have allergies, identify the triggers, and provide further education on how to treat them.

