

## **Allergic Rhinitis**

### ***What Is Allergic Rhinitis?***

Known to most people as “hayfever”, allergic rhinitis is a very common medical problem. The most familiar symptoms include frequent sneezing-often in rapid succession, runny and/or stuffy nose, sinus headache, congestion, and itching of nose, eyes, throat or roof of mouth. There are two forms of allergic rhinitis - seasonal and perennial. What type of allergic rhinitis you may have depends on what you are allergic to and the onset and duration of your symptoms.

### ***Seasonal Allergic Rhinitis***

Seasonal allergic rhinitis surfaces in the spring, summer, and/or early fall and is usually caused by allergic sensitivity to plant pollens or to airborne mold spores.

Weeds, grasses and tree release tiny grains of pollen as part of their reproductive cycle. These tiny particles are carried in the air and are inhaled. The time of year those plants pollinate determines when your symptoms will begin. Trees release their pollen throughout the spring. Grasses pollinate in the summer followed by weeds in the late summer and early fall. Ragweed, the most common plant allergen, makes August and September especially miserable for people.

Outdoor mold spores are also a common seasonal allergen. Like pollen, these tiny particles are carried in the air and inhaled. Molds thrive in damp, dark places. Soil, rotting wood and leaves are a few examples. Molds usually appear after a spring thaw and hang around until the first hard frost.

Allergies to pollens and molds are usually their worst on dry, windy days and are better on rainy days. However, mold growth increases after a rainy spell. The most important action you can take to reduce your seasonal allergy symptoms is to avoid contact with the allergens. For example, if you are doing yard work like mowing, gardening or raking leaves, wear a lightweight face mask. Stay indoors as much as possible when pollen and mold counts are high. While inside, keep the windows closed and use an air conditioner with a clean filter.

### ***Perennial Allergic Rhinitis***

Perennial allergic rhinitis is a term used when a person experiences allergy symptoms year round. It is generally caused by a sensitivity to house dust and house dust mites, animal danders, and/or inside mold spores.

Dust mites are microscopic insects that thrive in bedding, carpeting, stuffed toys, furniture cushions, and closets even in the cleanest of homes. Symptoms are caused by an allergic reaction to a protein found in mite feces. Warm, humid conditions are optimal for dust mite survival.

All pets can cause allergies no matter how long their hair or whether or not they shed.

Most people who are allergic to pets are sensitive to animal dander which is detached skin cells. Invisible and extremely “sticky”, dander attaches itself to every thing from floors to ceiling. The best cure for pet allergies is to find another home for your pet. If this is not possible then the next best thing is to reduce your exposure. Keep them outside or only allow them in one area of the house and not in the bedroom. Vacuum daily to get rid of dander. Have someone who is not allergic wash your pet weekly and brush them daily.

Indoor mold spores, like outdoor mold spores, flourish in damp dark places but are inside our homes. We have all seen mold and mildew in damp basements and in shower stalls, however mold can also grow in such places as garbage pails, air conditioners, mattresses, potted plant soil, and especially under carpet laid on a concrete floor. To help control indoor mold keep the humidity low in all areas of the house. Use a dehumidifier in damp basements. Empty and clean dehumidifiers on a regular basis. Dry cleaning carpets is recommended because steam cleaning leaves carpets and carpet pads damp for hours or days. This is a breeding ground for mold and mildew growth. Clean damp areas such as refrigerator drip pans, shower stalls and curtains, under sinks and around toilets weekly with a mixture of one part bleach to twenty parts water.

To help decrease perennial allergy symptoms wear a dust mask when cleaning, vacuum often with a clean vacuum that has good suction and change bags regularly. Filtered bags are available for most vacuums at any allergy supply company. Keeping your heating, cooling and ventilation systems properly filtered and maintained can dramatically reduce household allergens. Clean and replace filters for air conditioners and furnaces often. Special filtering systems are also available. Once again, keep humidity levels low - between 40 - 50%.

***What else can I do to help my allergic rhinitis?***

Talk with your doctor. Many non-prescription and/or prescription medications are available to help relieve aggravating symptoms. Medications along with reducing exposure generally lessen symptoms considerably. Keep your doctor informed of prescription medications you are taking and also allergy medications that are or are not working for you. For patients with more severe symptoms that are not relieved with exposure reduction or medication, allergy injections are an option. Remember that medications and/or injections are not as beneficial unless you also reduce your exposure to allergens.