

Tips for Controlling Your Allergies

Do you love the outdoors, but find it hard to enjoy yourself when you are doing activities outside? Or perhaps you like animals, but need to keep your distance when you are around a friend or neighbor's pet? Do you have a runny nose, watery eyes, sneezing fits, or itchy skin rashes in these or other situations? If these symptoms are preventing you from enjoying your life to the fullest, you may be one of the 40 million Americans who suffer from allergies.

What is an allergy?

An allergy is a high level of sensitivity to things in the environment such as pollen, foods, dust, or microorganisms (allergens), in amounts that do not affect most people. When you have allergies, your immune system tries to get rid of or protect you from these allergens. When trying to protect you, your immune system stimulates the release of protective (inflammatory) chemicals, which trigger common allergy symptoms. Many people experience allergies in the spring, as flowering plants bloom. Yet, many allergy sufferers can be affected year-round by different types of plants, or by other common allergens, including perfumes, soaps, foods, smoke, smog, weeds, grasses, trees, pollens, outdoor & indoor molds, insects, and animals.

How do I know I have an allergy and not just a cold?

Colds and allergies may share some symptoms, but you should be able to tell which one is affecting you based on how long your symptoms last or if they keep coming back.

Common allergy symptoms include a runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, wheezing, watery and/or itchy eyes, and skin rashes. Symptoms **begin right after exposure to allergen(s)** and usually last as long as you are exposed to the allergen, or longer, until your body's reaction stops. If an allergen is present throughout the year, you may experience chronic symptoms.

Common cold symptoms include any of the above allergy symptoms, in addition to fever and aches and pains. Colds usually take a few days to reach their full force, but should gradually decrease and eventually completely clear up in several days to a week.

What can I do to feel better?

To improve your allergy symptoms, consider taking the following steps, depending on the allergen that is affecting you:

Pollens and Outdoor Molds

- Keep windows and doors closed.
- Use air conditioning.
- Do not use window and/or attic fans.
- Reduce periods of outdoor exposure.

Indoor Molds

- Fix leaking faucets and pipes.
- Remove sources of standing water.
- Clean moldy surfaces with a cleaner containing bleach.

House Dust Mites

- Place mattress, pillow and box springs in dust-proof covers.
- Wash pillows, sheets, and blankets in hot water (130° F) every week.
- Eliminate and/or reduce humidifier use.
- Avoid wall-to-wall carpet, blinds, wool blankets, upholstered and/or down-filled furniture, covers, or pillows. Do not keep things under the bed, where they are more likely to collect dust.

Animal Dander

- Keep furry or feathered pets out of the home, or at least out of the bedroom and off carpets and furniture.

Insect Allergens

- Never leave food out and never eat in the bedroom.
- Keep garbage in closed containers.
- Use baits, powders, gels, paste, or traps non-toxic to humans and pets to eliminate insects.
- If using sprays to kill, stay out of the room until the odor goes away.

What is the proper treatment for allergies?

Allergies are serious conditions and should be taken seriously. If an allergy goes untreated for long periods of time, it can lead to more permanent conditions, such as sinusitis and asthma. If you think you are suffering from an allergy, you should see a doctor. Your doctor can help you determine the cause of your allergies and work with you to develop the best treatment plan for your needs. This may include examining your family history or performing a physical exam and/or specific testing.

Your doctor may recommend that you completely avoid the allergen, which can be difficult in many cases. He/she may also recommend or prescribe medications to help with your symptoms, if you do come in contact with the allergen, or if it is unavoidable. Medications may include antihistamines, decongestants, bronchodilators, and anti-inflammatory drugs. Some medications may cause side effects, such as dry mouth, sleeplessness, an increase in blood pressure, or nausea, so be sure to let your doctor know if you experience any of these. If medications are not helping and complete avoidance of your allergens seems impossible, it might be time to consider immunotherapy (allergy shots). You and your doctor can discuss all treatment options to find the best one for you.

Should I move?

People can have allergies anywhere although there are some areas where allergens tend to be more common. You might see some improvement if pollens and molds in your new location are different than the ones in your previous location. However, new allergies can develop in a new location, even after two or three years. Using control strategies like those listed above ('What can I do to feel better') can reduce your exposure to allergens in any environment.

Can I “outgrow” my allergies?

Even though some allergies may improve over time, they will probably not disappear completely. Allergies can sometimes become dormant for a period of time and then suddenly re-appear.

Resources

Learn more from our online **Allergy Health Center** at www.HillPhysicians.com/YourHealth.

You may also find useful information through:

The American Lung Association: www.lungusa.org

American Academy of Allergies Asthma & Immunology: www.aaaai.org

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