

Allergies

- Clean floors with a damp cloth instead of vacuuming or sweeping
- Do not smoke

During pollen season:

- Monitor pollen forecast to better plan outdoor activities
- Plan outdoor activities in the afternoon when pollen counts are lowest (counts are usually highest in the morning)
- Avoid outdoor activities on very windy or sunny days when pollen counts are at their highest. Rain makes pollen fall to the ground
- Shower and wash hair after outdoor activities
- Keep windows closed and set the air conditioner to "re-circulate"
- Do not line-dry clothes and bedding outside

For more information or support:

Allergy / Asthma Information Association
www.aaia.ca

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Allergies are an exaggerated immune reaction to normally harmless substances known as allergens. When a susceptible person is first exposed to an allergen, an immune response is activated. Later re-exposure may result in the release of substances, including histamine, triggering a range of reactions.

Allergies vary in intensity and can take many forms including atopic dermatitis (eczema), asthma, and allergic rhinitis.

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Causes

Allergies are influenced by genetic predisposition. If one or both parents suffer from allergies, their children are more likely to develop allergies.

There are two types of allergic rhinitis:

- Seasonal (acute): occurs at specific times of the year and is a reaction to airborne allergens (e.g. ragweed, tree, and grass pollen)
- Perennial (chronic): occurs year-round and is usually a reaction to indoor allergens (e.g. dust mites, pet dander, and mould)

Symptoms

Allergy sufferers may experience one or several of the following symptoms:

- Runny nose with clear discharge
- Sneezing
- Itchy nose
- Nasal or sinus congestion
- Headache
- Postnasal drip
- Scratchy throat
- Red, inflamed skin and mucous membranes
- Red eyes
- Itchy eyes
- Watery eyes
- Wheezing or difficulty breathing
- Cough
- Asthma (in severe cases)
- Hives
- Anaphylactic shock

Treatment

There is a vast array of treatments available with many remedies available over-the-counter. Speak to your pharmacist to see which product is best for you. Generally speaking, starting treatment before exposure to the allergen is more

Diagnosis

To help your doctor make a proper diagnosis, providing basic information such as symptoms, time of day or season, and substances believed to be responsible, is helpful. Painless skin tests may also be ordered.

effective than starting when symptoms are already present.

Using a saline solution to irrigate the nasal passages may help improve symptoms of allergic rhinitis.

Another option is allergy desensitization. This involves the administration of small amounts of allergy-triggering substances to build tolerance, reducing the intensity of symptoms upon re-exposure.

Prevention

The best prevention is to avoid contact with allergens. Since this is not always possible, try to limit exposure. To reduce symptoms:

For allergies caused by dust and dust mites:

- Keep humidity levels in the house between 40-45% and minimize use of humidifiers
- Avoid having rugs, carpets, and other dust-collecting objects in the house
- Avoid having pets in the house
- Wash bedding in hot water at least every 2 weeks
- Use specially designed, allergy-proof mattress and pillow covers