

Allergies

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An allergy is an extra sensitive way your body reacts to things such as dust, pet dander and pollen. Allergies can run in families.

Symptoms

Allergy symptoms include:

- runny nose
- sneezing
- itchy, watery, red eyes
- nasal congestion
- pressure in your nose and cheeks.

Allergy Triggers

There are certain triggers you should try to avoid that can make your symptoms worse:

- tobacco smoke
- wind, car exhaust and air pollutants
- cold air
- chemical sprays
- perfumes, scented deodorants and other strong odors
- cold, damp weather
- strong emotions or stress.

Common Allergies

- **Pollen** from trees, weeds and grasses floats in the air. During warm weather, these allergens get in your eyes, nose and throat. For most people, this causes no problems. But, if you have allergies, these allergens cause a runny nose, coughing, sneezing and watery eyes. You are in the grasp of hay fever, the more common name for a pollen allergy.
- **Mold** forms in damp, watery areas such as your bathroom or basement. This allergy flares up during humid and rainy weather.
- **Pet dander** is bits of fur and skin. You can pick it up right from your pet or breathe it in from dust.
- **Dust** contains dander, mold, fibers and mites. Mites live in bedding, furniture and carpeting. Their waste products trigger the allergy.

Life-threatening Allergies

The following allergies can range from mild to life-threatening:

- **food allergies:** peanuts, peanut butter, tree nuts, eggs, milk, soy, shellfish and food sulfites
- **bee or insect stings.**

Symptoms can include itching, watery eyes, runny nose, cough, hives, rash, trouble breathing, swollen tongue, dark circles under the eyes, vomiting or a drop in blood pressure.

Get help right away if you have any of those symptoms.

(over)

How to Avoid Allergens

You can't cure allergies, but you can take steps to avoid severe symptoms. These tips are from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases:

- Stay indoors in the morning when outdoor pollen levels are the highest. Check the pollen index on the local news or on the Internet.
- Wear face masks that filter out pollen if you must be outdoors.
- Keep windows closed and use the air conditioner in your house and car.
- Dry your clothes indoors.
- Avoid exposure to insect sprays, tobacco smoke, air pollution and fresh tar or paint.
- Avoid yard work (including mowing) as much as possible.
- Avoid carpeting in your house. Wood, tile or linoleum floors are best for getting rid of dust. If you have carpeting, you can treat it with tannic acid.
- Put box springs and mattresses into dust- or allergen-proof zippered plastic covers. Scrub bed springs outside the bedroom.
- Keep pets out of your bedroom.
- Wash bedding and bedclothes in water at least 130 degrees Fahrenheit. Hot water will kill dust mites. Wash curtains once a week.
- Use a damp cloth to clean noncarpeted floors, mop boards, non-upholstered furniture, the tops of windows and window sills once a week.
- Use air filters and dehumidifiers. Good air filters include electrostatic and high-energy particulate absorption (HEPA) filters. Electrostatic filters emit ozone, which could trigger asthma (if you have it). Be sure to clean dehumidifiers often to prevent mold growth.

Medicines to Treat Allergies

Medicines to treat allergies are available by prescription or over-the-counter. Together, you and your doctor can decide which medicines are best for you:

- antihistamines to help reduce the runny nose and sneezing, hives, bug bites, dark circles under your eyes, and itchy, watery eyes (such as Allegra[®], Benadryl[®], Claritin[®], Tavist[®] and Zyrtec[®]).
- rescue inhalers to give quick, short-term relief of symptoms
- cortisone cream to help relieve itchy skin
- nasal sprays (such as cromolyn sodium) to help keep allergic reactions from starting
- oral and nasal decongestants to reduce congestion.
- allergy shots (immunotherapy) to help with long-term symptom relief. They are given on a schedule.
- EpiPen[®] to be given in an emergency.

Do not start taking any medicine without first talking with your doctor. Take your controller medicines even if you feel well.

**Information adapted from the
National Institute of Allergy and
Infectious Diseases.**