

Surviving Spring Allergies



suffer from seasonal allergies, the budding trees and flowers signal the beginning of misery.

Seasonal allergic rhinitis, often referred to as “hay fever,” is triggered by allergens, such as pollens or molds. Many trees, grasses and weeds have small, light and dry pollens that are easily carried by the wind. Some of the major outdoor allergens that cause allergic reactions during this time of year are from trees, such as oak, elm, birch, ash, hickory, poplar, sycamore, maple, cypress, walnut and western red cedar; and grasses such as timothy, Bermuda, orchard, red top, and sweet vernal.

These allergens are breathed in and combine with an antibody called immunoglobulin E (IgE). IgE, the “allergic antibody,” is normally present in very low levels in the body, but is found in larger quantities in people with allergies.

After a long winter, the arrival of spring is usually a welcome sight. However, for the approximately 40 million North Americans who

This pairing of the allergen and IgE causes the release of chemicals like histamine and the onset of symptoms, such as:

- Sneezing
- Wheezing
- Stuffy nose
- Itchy, watery eyes
- Burning throat

Since allergies can lead to other chronic conditions such as asthma, they should not be taken lightly. If seasonal allergy symptoms are making you miserable, you should work with an allergist/immunologist who will take a thorough history and conduct tests to determine exactly which pollens and molds are triggering your symptoms. The allergist will then work with you to develop a management plan, which may include medication and certain environmental controls, such as avoiding the pollens and molds that make you sneeze and wheeze.

The following are some tips to help you lessen your exposure to seasonal allergens:

- Use an air conditioner and a dehumidifier to keep air clean, cool and dry.
- Use large, waxy flowers like lilies and tulips to decorate your home. Their pollen is too heavy and sticky to enter the air and cause an allergic reaction.
- If possible, stay indoors, especially between 5 a.m. and 10 a.m., when pollen counts are highest, and on windy days.
- Keep the windows closed in your home and your car.
- Avoid mowing and raking.
- After spending time outdoors, remove shoes outside to avoid bringing pollen indoors. Change your clothes as soon as possible to avoid continued contact with accumulated pollen.
- Shower after spending extended periods of time outdoors. This will remove built up pollen from skin and hair.
- Do not hang clothing or sheets outside to dry. They will collect pollen and mold.