

Beware Of The Allergens

Anything can be an allergen. Some substances, because of their chemical make-up, are more prone to generate an allergic response in humans. Pollens, food, mold, dust, feathers, environmental pollutants, drugs, and animal dander, can cause allergic reactions.

Certain allergens are always present, causing symptoms year round. These include house dust, pet dander, wool, various chemicals used around the house, and more. Symptoms can be worse in winter when the house is closed up. Mold spores are also present throughout the year. Dead leaves and farm areas are common sources for outdoor molds. Indoor molds include plants, old books, bathrooms, and damp areas. Molds are also found in foods such as cheese and fermented beverages.

Seasonal allergies are active when pollen is present. Early springtime allergies are most often caused by pollens of trees such as elm, maple, birch, poplar, beech, ash, oak, walnut, sycamore, cypress, hickory, pecan, cottonwood, and box elder. Late springtime allergies and summer pollens come from the grasses, i.e., timothy, orchard, bermuda, and some bluegrasses. Weeds begin to pollinate in late August and continue until the first frost. Weed pollens include ragweed, pigweed, lambs quarters, yellowdock (sheep sorrel), english plantain, mugwort, careless weed and sage.

Colorful or fragrant flowering plants rarely cause allergy because their pollens are too heavy to be airborne.



Allergy Department



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A Guide to Allergies



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What Is An Allergy?

Forty five million Americans suffer from allergies. Allergic rhinitis was once known as hay fever because workers would sneeze and develop nasal and sinus congestion when they worked around hay in the fields. Hay fever, asthma, and eczema are the most common symptoms of an allergic reaction.

Allergy symptoms appear when the body's immune system begins to respond to a substance as though it were a dangerous invader (called an antigen or allergen). It does this by sending specific defenders, called antibodies, to the entry site.

The battle between allergen and antibody results in the release of chemical mediators, such as histamine, into the blood stream. These chemical mediators cause changes in the body which produce the symptoms that we feel.

Symptoms that may be caused by an allergy are itching eyes, sneezing, nasal stuffiness, nasal congestion and drainage, and sometimes, headache. Some people experience hearing changes, scratchy, sore throats, hoarseness, and cough.

Other less common symptoms include balance disturbances, swelling in the face or throat tissues, skin irritations, and even respiratory problems and asthma

How Is An Allergy Diagnosed?

Allergy testing is not always required in order to diagnose a patient. Based on detailed history and examination, your doctor may advise allergy testing to determine the specific substances to which you are allergic.

Blood Tests

Blood tests are available to identify specific allergens. But because they are not as sensitive as skin testing, they may be negative. Blood tests are used when patients are on medications that could interfere with skin testing or when patients can not tolerate skin testing.

Prick Skin Tests

Prick skin tests are a good screening test for allergies. Allergy antigens are placed on the forearm and read in twenty minutes. Because there is very little discomfort, it is a good screening tool for young children or when the doctor suspects a patient has allergies. This test is not as sensitive as intradermal skin testing.

Intradermal Skin Testing

This is the test of choice if allergy shots are being considered as a course of treatment or if there is a strong indication of an allergy but the blood or prick tests were negative. This test is performed by injecting a tiny amount of different allergens under the skin surface.

What Is The Treatment?

The treatment suggested by your doctor will depend on what you are allergic to and the degree of your sensitivity.

Allergy symptom control is most successful when multiple management approaches are used at the same time. Minimizing exposure to allergens, managing symptoms with medications and desensitization with allergy shots, are methods that can be used in allergy symptom.

A number of medications are useful in the treatment of allergy including antihistamines, nasal steroid sprays, leukotriene inhibitors, and systemic steroids.

Immunotherapy, or allergy shots, provide the only treatment method that can offer lasting relief or cure from allergies. Before beginning a series of such shots, allergy testing must be performed.

Why Don't We Use Oral Drops For Allergies?

1. They are not currently FDA approved
2. They are not covered by insurance, at this time.