

Seasonal Allergies

Easy as a walk in the park? Whoever coined that phrase was not a seasonal allergy sufferer. For those who do suffer from seasonal allergies, even the briefest encounters with the outdoors during certain times of year can cause an onslaught of sneezing, itching, and general misery. All allergic reactions are caused by a reaction of the body's immune system to the environment. However, sometimes the body overreacts to harmless substances such as pollens, dust and molds—resulting in allergies. The most common symptom to this overreaction is allergic rhinitis, commonly known as “hay fever.” Allergic rhinitis closely mimics cold symptoms, causing things like runny nose, watery eyes, and sneezing¹.

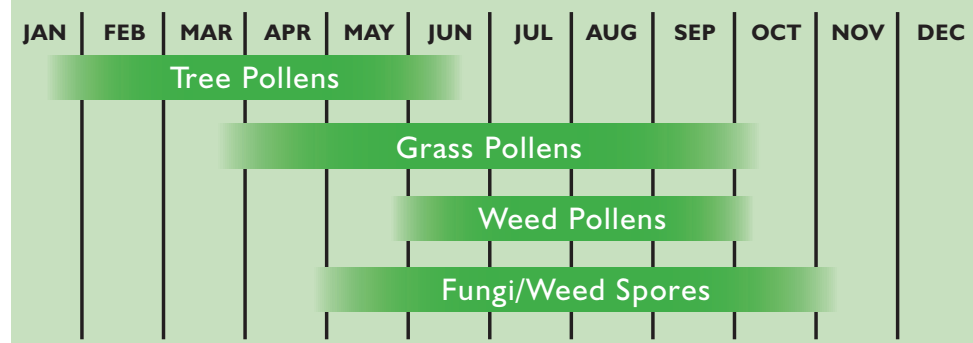
Seasonal allergies affect approximately 35 million Americans. That is nearly 15% of the population.²

Strategies for Seasonal Allergy Sufferers

You can't hide from seasonal allergies, but you can minimize your exposure to allergens with these simple tips:

- Keep windows shut when the pollen count is high, including those in your house and car. Use air conditioning if possible.
- Avoid hanging laundry outside, where pollen may stick to the fibers and cause you irritation⁴.
- Delegate outdoor chores like lawn mowing and weed-pulling. If you must work outside, wear a face mask⁴.
- Stay indoors on dry, windy days. The best time to go outside is after a good rain, which helps clear pollen from the air.
- Plan outdoors activities for later in the day, when pollen counts are lower.
- Use a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter in your bedroom and keep windows closed at night.

This graph shows the most common irritants during the year.



Check this out! You can view daily pollen counts in the Provo area at www.pollen.com.

Additional Strategies for Non-Seasonal Allergy Sufferers:

Your home should be a safe-haven. However, even the cleanest homes can harbor a multitude of potential allergens such as dust mites, mold, pet dander, and residues from rodents and pests. The following tips will help you allergy-proof your home.

- Use allergy-proof covers on mattresses, box springs and pillows
- Dust mites and mold flourish in hot, humid conditions. Limit the growth of these pestilences by maintaining a temperature of 70 degrees or cooler and limiting relative humidity to 30 to 50% inside of your home².
- Develop a weekly cleaning routine. Use damp mops on wood and laminate flooring. Use vacuum cleaners with HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filters. Dust using damp rags².
- Wash all bedding every 7 to 14 days in water heated to 130 degrees Fahrenheit⁴.
- Use household cleaners in well-ventilated areas.
- Do not smoke or allow anyone else to smoke anywhere within your home².
- Use a HEPA filter in your bedroom at night⁴.

What If Avoiding Allergens Is Not Enough?

Sometimes the above preventative measures are not enough. If you are still experiencing serious symptoms, you may want to talk to your doctor about allergy medications that are available.

Nasal Corticosteroids—These prescription nasal sprays often improve troublesome symptoms after about a week of use. Common sprays include Flonase, Rhinocort, and Nasonex.

Antihistamines—Antihistamines help to relieve itching, sneezing, and runny nose. They are available by prescription and over-the-counter. Newer varieties help relieve side effects without causing drowsiness. Talk to your doctor about the best option for you.

Decongestants—Decongestants come in the form of liquids, tablets, and nasal sprays, as both prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs. Beware of oral decongestants if you have high blood pressure or prostate enlargement, as they may worsen these conditions. Also avoid using decongestant sprays for more than a few days at a time because prolonged use can result in rebound decongestion.

Leukotriene Modifier—These are taken in tablet form and must be prescribed. They block the immune system chemicals, leukotrienes, which cause symptoms such as excess mucous production.

Allergen Immunotherapy—This step is usually pursued if the above medications don't work. This treatment is commonly known as "allergy shots." Allergen immunotherapy may help to decrease your body's sensitivity to allergens over time⁴.

Is It a Cold or an Allergy?

How can you tell if those sniffles are caused by allergies or the common cold? The following table from the US Department of Health and Human Services will help you tell the difference and provide the proper treatments.

Symptoms	Cold	Airborne Allergy
Cough	Common	Sometimes
General Aches, Pains	Slight	Never
Fatigue, Weakness	Sometimes	Sometimes
Itchy Eyes	Rare or Never	Common
Sneezing	Usual	Usual
Sore Throat	Common	Sometimes
Runny Nose	Common	Common
Stuffy Nose	Common	Common
Fever	Rare	Never
Duration	3 to 14 days	Weeks (for example, 6 weeks for ragweed or grass pollen seasons)
Treatment	Antihistamines, decongestants, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines	Antihistamines, nasal steroids, decongestants
Prevention	Wash your hands often, avoid close contact with anyone with a cold	Avoid those things that you are allergic to such as pollen, house dust mites, mold, pet dander, cockroaches
Complications	Sinus infection, middle ear infection, asthma	Sinus infection, asthma

www.niaid.nih.gov

**Do your allergies keep you from gardening?
Check out the article "Gardening With Allergies" found at www.aafa.org (search for "gardening")**

REFERENCES

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