

What Is Allergic Rhinitis?

Allergic rhinitis (also known as "hay fever" or "allergies") is a condition that affects the mucous membranes of the nose. The eyes and sometimes the palate or throat are also often affected.

What Are the Symptoms?

You may experience some or all of the symptoms of allergies, which include sneezing; nasal congestion (stiffness); runny nose; and itchiness in the nose, roof of the mouth, throat, eyes, and ears. Less frequently, postnasal drainage may cause a cough or excessive throat clearing.

What Causes Allergies?

Allergic rhinitis is an overreaction to certain foreign matter in the environment, called allergy triggers or allergens. Potential allergens include dust, mold, pollens, animal dander, and cockroaches. Exposure to these allergens causes certain cells in the mucous membranes of the nose to release histamine, leukotrienes, and other chemical substances, which cause the symptoms.

Are There Complications?

Sometimes allergic rhinitis leads to complications, such as ear infections, sinusitis, recurrent sore throats, asthma, cough, headaches, altered sleep patterns, fatigue, irritability, and poor work or school performance. Preventing these complications is one reason why it is important to have your allergies properly treated.

What Is the Treatment?

Avoidance Measures. Whenever possible, you should avoid the inhaled allergens that cause you to react (see reverse side). It is also important to avoid irritating substances, such as smoke, chemicals, or strong odors.

Medications. A variety of medications is available today to treat allergic rhinitis. The medication(s) prescribed for you will represent a treatment plan that has been individualized to suit your condition. For example, your doctor may prescribe an antihistamine (a pill that sometimes also contains

a decongestant); a leukotriene modifier (also a pill); a nasal steroid spray; and/or other types of medications.

Allergy Immunization. Allergy immunization ("allergy shots") or desensitization is another method of treatment. This helps you build your own immunity to the allergens and usually reduces symptoms and medication requirements over a period of time. This treatment option can be discussed with your physician.

What About Over-the-Counter Medications or Herbal Remedies?

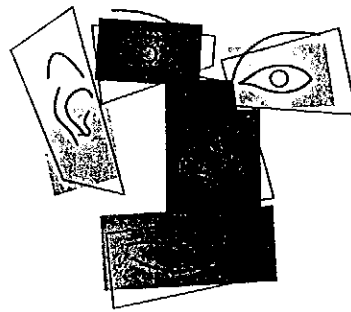
You should only take the medications prescribed or approved by your doctor. Many over-the-counter allergy medications or herbal remedies can cause unwanted side effects. For example, some nonprescription antihistamines cause significant drowsiness, which can impair your ability to drive, operate machinery, or perform at school or work.

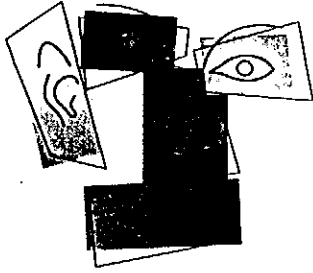
Also, **DO NOT** use over-the-counter decongestant nasal sprays for more than 3 days in a row unless specifically advised to do so by your physician. These sprays can cause undesirable side effects and actually cause more nasal congestion after a period of time.

Contact Your Physician

Be sure to contact your physician if

- Your medication is not effective in reducing your symptoms.
- Your medication is causing undesirable side effects.
- You have further questions or concerns about your allergies.



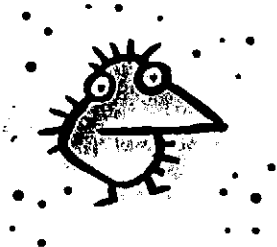


Methods for Avoiding Your

You can help keep your allergies under control by avoiding, whenever possible, the specific inhaled allergens that cause you to react. Below are some avoidance and environmental control strategies for the different triggers known to cause allergies:

To avoid/control dust mites

- Cover mattresses and pillows with allergy-proof casings
- Wash bedding in hot water (>130°F) every week
- Remove wall-to-wall carpeting, especially in the bedroom
- Remove upholstered furniture
- Do not use ceiling fans
- Keep household humidity low (<50%)



To avoid/control animal dander

- Keep furry pets out of the bedroom at all times and outdoors as much as possible
- Use a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter in the bedroom
- Remove wall-to-wall carpeting
- Bathe pets and wash pet bedding weekly



To avoid/control cockroaches

- Have a professional exterminate your house (use nonpyrethrum-based insecticides)
- Control their food supply



To avoid/control mold

- Eliminate moisture and high levels of humidity indoors ($\geq 35\%$)
- Do not use humidifiers or else clean them with bleach
- Repair water leaks
- Check basement, attic, and crawl space for mold and moisture



To avoid/control exposure to pollen

- Check pollen levels during allergy season
- Stay indoors during peak pollen counts
- Keep car and house windows closed and run air conditioners
- Avoid mowing lawn, raking leaves
- Clean furnace and air conditioner filters often

Freeman P. *J Allergy Clin.* 2000; 105 (6 pt 2): S616-S621.