

HEALTH ALERT!

It's Sneezin' Season! But Is It Allergies or Sinusitis?

(NAPSA)—Ah choo! It's allergy season and it seems like everyone is suffering from a runny or stuffed nose. In fact, a recent survey found that almost 40 percent of American consumers feel just like Snow White's friend, Sneezy, this time of year. But is it really allergies that are making them feel so...sneezy...or something else, like a full blown sinus infection?

Each year, 37 million Americans suffer from sinusitis (inflammation of the sinuses) resulting in nearly 12 million doctor visits. Symptoms of sinus-related conditions can be debilitating for many sufferers. In fact, in a recent survey of 1,008 consumers and 127 physicians, more than one half (54 percent) of consumers said they lost sleep at least twice during allergy season last year due to sinus-related symptoms, causing them to be less alert at work the next day. Twenty-five percent of consumers also reported missing at least 3 days of work or school due to illness during allergy season last year.

Symptoms Are Similar

Experts say it's important patients know that while symptoms may seem similar, there are differences between allergies, a viral infection like a cold, and a bacterial sinus infection because treatment options differ. Fifty-one percent of physicians surveyed said they believe that patients with sinus-related symptoms wait too long before coming in to see them for treatment.

"Allergy symptoms tend to disappear when you are away from the source. In other words, when you're no longer near that cat or tree that makes you sneeze and your eyes itch or water, your symptoms will go away," said Dr. Robert Knox, an ear, nose and throat specialist from the University of Louisville.



SINUSITIS CAUSES—Although colds are the most common cause of sinusitis, people suffering from allergies may also be predisposed to the development of sinusitis.

"With a cold, the typical runny nose and other symptoms tend to go away or lessen after about a week. But a bacterial sinus infection lasts longer. The mucus tends to thicken and discolor, and there's usually pain associated with it."

Sinusitis

Sinusitis, caused by a bacterial infection, can occur as a late complication of a common cold. Nasal congestion produces swelling in the sinus cavity, obstructing drainage and causing mucus to stagnate. Unfortunately, this provides a perfect breeding ground for infection.

Sinusitis becomes chronic when it lasts longer than three months. Chronic sinusitis may be caused by a bacterial infection but is more often a chronic inflammatory disorder. Other causes for chronic sinusitis are immune problems or structural abnormalities in the nasal cavity.

Although colds are the most common cause of sinusitis, people suffering from allergies also may be predisposed to the development of sinusitis. Interestingly, in the

survey endorsed by the American Academy of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS) and supported by the Bayer Corporation, consumers reported 39 percent of their sinus infections began as simple allergies. According to Dr. Knox, as with colds, irritation from allergies can cause sinuses to become inflamed and filled with mucus, resulting in blockage of vital nasal drainage—which also can cause infection.

Sinus infections generally require a combination of medications. Some medicines treat symptoms and others treat infections. In addition to an appropriate antibiotic, when the sinus infection is bacterial, doctors also may prescribe a medicine to keep the sinus passages open by reducing obstruction and helping to control the allergy.

If you're interested in finding out more about the differences between allergies, viral and bacterial infections, log on to www.SinusFacts.com, an educational website sponsored by Bayer Corporation.