



HEALTH AWARENESS

Tips For Fighting Seasonal Allergies

(NAPSA)—If you sneeze, cough and have a runny nose every spring or fall—or all through the growing season—you probably have seasonal allergies. Doctors call it “seasonal allergic rhinitis.” There are ways to control it and, hopefully, to prevent it from triggering conditions like asthma and sinusitis.

Seasonal allergic rhinitis is usually caused by molds releasing spores into the air or by trees, grasses and weeds releasing their pollens. Everybody is exposed to them but only some people develop allergies to them. In these people, the immune system, which protects us from invaders like viruses and bacteria, reacts to a normally harmless substance called an allergen (allergy-causing compound). Specialized immune cells called mast cells and basophils then release chemicals like histamine that lead to the symptoms of allergy: sneezing, coughing, a runny or clogged nose, postnasal drip and itchy eyes and throat.

“There is nothing wrong with mast cells or basophils,” explains Dr. Dean Metcalfe, an allergy expert at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The immune system is just reacting to something we don’t want it to.

Peak seasons for pollens and molds depend on where you live; generally, tree pollen allergies strike late winter to early spring; grass allergies, spring through summer; and ragweed in the fall.

If you have allergic rhinitis, you have many options. First, avoid whatever you react to, if possible. Sunny, dry, windy days can be bad if you have pollen allergies, so stay indoors on those days, with the windows closed. Some people move to where the offending pollen doesn’t grow. This may help for a while, but people who are allergic to one thing tend to develop allergies to others and may soon be suffering again.



There are a number of ways for people to deal with seasonal allergies.

If avoidance doesn’t work, allergies can often be controlled with medications. The first choice is an antihistamine, which counters the effects of histamine.

Steroid nasal sprays can reduce mucus secretion and nasal swelling. NIH says that the combination of antihistamines and nasal steroids is very effective in those with moderate or severe symptoms of allergic rhinitis.

Cromolyn sodium is a nasal spray that inhibits the release of chemicals like histamine from mast cells. But you must start taking it several days before an allergic reaction begins, which is not always practical.

Immunotherapy, or allergy shots, is an option if the exact cause of your allergies can be pinpointed. Immunotherapy involves a long series of injections, but it can significantly reduce symptoms and medication needs.

For allergy information from NIH’s National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, visit www.niaid.nih.gov/publications/allergies.htm. For prevention strategies from NIH’s National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, visit www.niehs.nih.gov/airborne/prevent/intro.html.