

WELLNESS WATCH



Understanding And Treating Seasonal Allergies

(NAPSA)—For people dealing with seasonal allergies, the chronic symptoms—sneezing; runny nose; and itchy, watery eyes—often become a way of life. Yet even as they sneeze and suffer, many wonder why their bodies are reacting in that way.

Certain substances, called allergens, trigger allergic reactions in some individuals. Mold spores, dust mites, pet dander and pollens such as trees, grasses, weeds and ragweed are some common allergens. The allergens react with antibodies, causing histamine and other chemical substances to be released, which causes various symptoms. Often allergy symptoms will trigger sinus, respiratory and ear infections.

Allergy prevention

Awareness and avoidance of common allergens is key when treating allergies. Certain environmental precautions can greatly reduce an individual's suffering. For example, to reduce the effects of dust and dust mites, mattresses, box springs and pillows should be encased in allergy-proof covers. Feather and down pillows and comforters should be avoided. Stuffed animals, clutter, shelved books and other dust collectors should be kept to a minimum. In addition, High Efficiency Particulate Arrestance, or HEPA, air cleaners work well in removing allergens from the air.

Other precautionary measures include:

- Keeping doors and windows closed and the air conditioner on.
- Limiting exposure to wooded areas.
- Using a dehumidifier to reduce mold.
- Bathing indoor pets regularly.
- Avoiding cigarette smoke, heavy perfume and cutting the grass.

Treatment

Some of the most common treatments for seasonal allergies are over-the-counter antihistamines and decongestants. Unfortunately, many of these drugs cause drowsiness or may lead to excessive dryness of the nose and throat. Physi-



Seasonal allergy sufferers should discuss their condition with their physicians, who can suggest treatment options.

cians, however, have other options which may not cause drowsiness. Prescription steroids and steroid nasal sprays, which work to decrease inflammation, are another treatment for allergies. Allergy shots are usually administered if environmental precautions and medications have failed to provide relief. The shots are given in a series designed to reduce sensitivity to allergens, beginning with a weak dosage once or twice a week and then progressing to stronger doses but administered less frequently.

According to osteopathic physicians, or D.O.s, people have options when it comes to dealing with allergies. They can determine a method of treatment to suit patients' lifestyles, so the patients realize improvements in their quality of life and productivity.

D.O.s are fully licensed physicians able to prescribe medication and perform surgery. They treat people, not just symptoms.

To learn more about D.O.s and osteopathic medicine, visit the American Osteopathic Association's Web site at www.aoa-net.org or call toll-free 1-800-621-1773.