8 Ways to Find Relief

Allergies can make you feel as though there is no place for you to find relief — your home, workplace and even the great outdoors are full of substances that can bring on an allergic reaction. Take these steps to protect yourself:

1. AVOID outdoor activity in the morning, when pollen levels are highest.
2. WEAR a face mask when working outdoors or in damp areas (such as a greenhouse) to reduce exposure to pollen, dust and mold.
3. CHOOSE vacation spots where pollen and allergies are lowest, such as the seashore.
4. CLEAN rugs, drapes and upholstery with a vacuum cleaner equipped with a special HEPA filter that removes allergens, especially if you have pet dander allergy and can't bear to part with your furry friend.
5. KEEP your home and workplace dust-free, and wear a face mask when cleaning.
6. WEAR rubber gloves when using cleaners or chemicals if you have skin allergies, and avoid changing your soap, shampoo and cosmetics.
7. SLEEP easier by using a mattress and pillow made of materials that do not encourage mold growth, or cover what you have in nonallergenic plastic.
8. USE an air conditioner at home and in your car to keep allergens from entering through open windows, and change filters frequently.

Allergy Medication Overview

Your doctor will recommend what can best relieve symptoms. Some options include:

Nasal corticosteroids: Nose sprays such as Nasonex or Flonase

Oral antihistamines: These are available both by prescription and over the counter. They include diphenhydramine (Benadryl) and chlorpheniramine (Chlor-Trimeton). Drowsiness is a common side effect. Some prescription antihistamines, such as Allegra and Zyrtec, and Claritin, which is available over the counter, do not cause drowsiness.

Decongestants: Available in oral or nasal spray forms. By prescription or over the counter, these medicines work on nasal congestion and are used with antihistamines.

Bronchodilators: Used to open bronchial tubes in the lungs to relieve coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath. They can be inhaled, taken orally or injected.

Anti-inflammatory medications: Sometimes prescribed to reduce swelling and irritation in the airway and lungs.

ALLERGIES
Your Guide to Breathing Easier

A COMMON PROBLEM

Sneezing; itchy eyes, mouth and throat; wheezing; skin irritation; runny nose … for allergy sufferers, these symptoms are all too familiar. Allergy is more than a minor discomfort — it is a major cause of illness and lost work time. Pollen allergy, or hay fever, is the leading cause of allergy symptoms in the United States, while people in the rest of the world have more allergies to airborne dust.

If you have allergies, it may seem that simply breathing in the air around you irritates your symptoms. Don't suffer in silence. Read on to learn more about how you can get relief.

What Is Allergy?

Allergy is hypersensitivity to a normally harmless substance, such as pollen, dust or animal dander. When a person has an allergy, the immune system attacks the substance. This causes an overproduction of chemicals such as histamine, resulting in symptoms such as watery eyes and sneezing.

Anaphylactic shock,

or anaphylaxis, is a severe reaction often caused by allergy to penicillin, certain foods such as nuts and shellfish, or stinging insects. It causes swelling in the throat and other tissues, vomiting, cramps and a sudden drop in blood pressure. Anaphylactic shock is life threatening. If you witness someone having a severe allergic reaction, call for help immediately. If you have an allergy that could result in anaphylaxis, wear a medical alert tag. You also need to carry an EpiPen (epinephrine, also known as adrenaline). It's the drug of choice for treatment.

Cold or Allergy?

There are important differences between cold and allergy symptoms. A cold …

- Is often accompanied by a fever and chills
- Produces mucus that is yellow or green
- Has a progression of symptoms and lasts 3-10 days

Allergies normally produce clear nasal discharge, are not accompanied by fever, can be long lasting and may come and go seasonally or seemingly at random.

Something in the Air

Most allergies are from airborne allergens, although people can also have allergies to medications, foods, chemicals and other substances that are either touched or ingested. Common symptoms of airborne allergies include:

- Sneezing
- Runny or stuffed-up nose
- Itchy eyes, nose and throat
- Dark circles under the eyes caused by increased blood flow near sinuses
- Watery, red-rimmed or swollen eyes

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional care. Medical Editor: Zvelka Fazlic, M.D.
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