

Healthy Living



Healthy Living Newsletter
All About Allergies

April 2007

An Allergy Is Not a Disease

Doctors don't consider an allergy to be a disease in the typical sense. Instead, an allergy is an exaggeration of the body's natural immune defenses. Still, mild allergies can be annoying, and severe forms can be very serious – even deadly.

Allergies vary in the types of symptoms they cause and the best methods to prevent and treat them. The type of allergy you have depends on three major factors:

1. The allergen that provokes your symptoms (such as mold and cat dander)
2. The specific areas of the body affected by your allergy (such as airways, skin or nose)
3. Whether or not the reaction stays in one place or travels throughout your body

Types of allergies:

1. **Allergic asthma**, a type of allergy that may be triggered by a variety of airborne substances, is an exaggerated immune reaction confined to the airways of the lungs.
2. **Seasonal allergies** (see following article), caused by pollen in the air, are usually limited to the nose, eyes and sometimes the sinuses and the airways.
3. **Perennial allergies** (see following article) have symptoms similar to seasonal allergies but can be caused year round by indoor airborne allergens like mold and pet dander.
4. **An allergic reaction to an insect sting** can trigger a severe response that affects the whole body. This response, called anaphylaxis, is potentially fatal.

Source: www.intelihealth.com

Hay Fever and Its Sister, Perennial Allergic Rhinitis

Hay fever, also known as seasonal allergic rhinitis, is an allergy-related inflammation of the nasal passages, throat and eye membrane. It's caused by sensitivity to airborne pollens and molds that come from trees, grasses, weeds and other plants whose pollens are carried by the wind rather than by insects. Different types of pollen trigger symptoms in different people, so each person's specific hay fever season is fairly predictable (see the table below), based on when their allergy-triggering plant is in bloom.

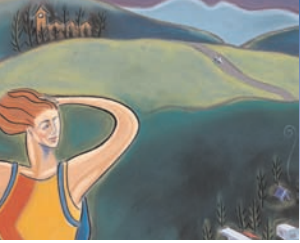
A sister ailment, perennial allergic rhinitis, is a year-round sensitivity to animal dander, dust mites and cockroaches. It's most common in people who have a family history of allergies or a personal history of allergy-related conditions, such as eczema and childhood asthma. Currently, about 20% of the U.S. population suffers from either hay fever or perennial allergic rhinitis.

Source: www.intelihealth.com

What You Are Allergic To?

If You Have Symptoms in the . . .	You May Be Allergic to . . .
Spring	Tree pollens
Summer	Grass and weed pollens
Late Summer and Fall	Ragweed
All Year	Dust mites, molds, animal dander

Source: www.intelihealth.com



Battling Your Hay Fever

Here are some additional ideas that will help you prevent hay fever attacks:

- Avoid the outdoors during months when you know that your hay fever symptoms will flare. If you must be outside for a long period, avoid the high pollen count times (before 10 a.m. and after sunset). Early afternoon is usually the safest time to be outdoors.
- In your car, keep the external vents closed and use air conditioning.
- Minimize activities like lawn mowing and leaf blowing that give a heavy exposure to pollens.
- When planning your garden, choose bright, colorful flowers. Their brightness usually means that the plant is pollinated by insects rather than by wind.
- Take a shower or wash your hair before going to bed at night to remove pollen that accumulated during the day.
- It's best not to have pets if you have hay fever.
- If you do have furry pets, try to wash them once a week, keep them out of your bedroom and keep them off the furniture.
- Dry your clothes inside the house, not on a clothesline outside.

Source: www.intelihealth.com

Test Your Knowledge

Decide whether each statement is true or false. The answers appear below.

1. Inspections in the U.S. have found bakeries using potential food allergens in products without listing those ingredients even when the bakeries thought they were in compliance with food-labeling regulations.
2. You can avoid excess air pollution by traveling mid-day.
3. 54.6% of Americans test positive for allergies.
4. Allergies affect about 30 million people in the U.S.
5. If you have allergies, you should take extra precautions when traveling abroad.

Answers: (1) True; (2) False – Air pollution levels are lower early in the morning and late in the evening; (3) True; (4) False – It's more like 40-50 million; (5) True

Sources: www.aafa.org, www.intelihealth.com, www.aaaai.org

Smite the Mite

Microscopic insects called dust mites thrive on food debris, human skin, and high humidity. They're among the most common allergic asthma triggers, affecting an estimated 80% of people with allergies. They live in nearly every home and office in carpets, fabrics, and especially beds, where they feast off shed human skin. Destroy their comfy living quarters. Enclose your mattress in an airtight, dustproof cover. Cover it with a washable mattress pad. Keep a bedspread on your bed during the day. Wash your sheets in hot water every week. Wash your mattress pads and synthetic blankets every two weeks. Wash your pillows every month. Cleanliness is next to mite-lessness.

Source: www.buzzle.com

The Foods People Are Most Allergic To

Peanuts and other nuts

Fish and shellfish

Milk, particularly cow's milk

Eggs

Soy

Wheat

Sources: www.kidshealth.org, www.familydoctor.org