

Allergic Rhinitis/ Conjunctivitis

Allergic rhinitis or conjunctivitis is caused by things that trigger inflammation in the nose or eyes, called *allergens*. These allergens can be found both outdoors and indoors. When allergic rhinitis is caused by common outdoor allergens—such as mold or trees, grass and weed pollens—it is often referred to as seasonal allergies, or “hayfever.” Allergic rhinitis or conjunctivitis may also be triggered by allergens that are in your house, such as animal dander (tiny skin flakes and saliva), indoor mold, or the droppings of cockroaches or house dust mites—tiny creatures found in the home.

- If you have symptoms in spring, you are probably allergic to tree pollens.
- If you have symptoms in the summer, you are probably allergic to grass and weed pollens.
- If you have symptoms in late summer and fall, you probably are allergic to ragweed.
- Dust mites, molds and animal dander (saliva or skin flakes) cause symptoms all year.

Typical symptoms of allergies include clear nasal discharge with sneezing, sniffing, and nasal itching; ear and sinus congestion; headache- particular in the facial area; a tickly or scratchy sensation in the throat; itchy ear canals; hoarse voice; and itchy skin and/or hives.

Fever is NOT a typical symptom, despite the term “hay fever” used to describe seasonal allergies.

PREVENTION: the best way to avoid allergies is to avoid or remove the offending substance.

1. For pollen-keep windows shut and use the air conditioner. **Show**er immediately upon coming inside from the outdoors. Use a **nasal saline rinse** to wash pollen out of the nasal passages, and **saline eye wash** to clear pollen out of the eyes. Individual packets of eye saline can be purchased over-the-counter to carry with you to outdoor events.

2. For dust and dust mites- purchase **plastic mattress** and **pillow covers** for beds/pillows (available at most home goods stores.) WET dust in rooms. Wash bedding regularly, and limit stuffed animals and other dust catchers in the bed area. Remove old or thick carpeting, and vacuum remaining flooring regularly. For severe cases, consider a room HEPA filter- a machine that can filter out small particles of dust.

ANTI-HISTAMINES: these products combat the irritating effects of histamine, a chemical released by the body when reacting to allergens. There are many over-the-counter products available for use. **Chlorpheniramine** and **benadryl** work well for allergy, but are short-acting and may cause drowsiness.

Loratadine (Claritin), cetirizine (Zyrtec) and fexofenadine (Allegra) are longer acting antihistamines now available over the counter that are less sedating and work for 24 hours. They are available in liquid, dissolving tablet, chewable and pill forms. If they do make your child sleepy, try dosing at bedtime. Store brand loratadine works as well as Claritin at half the price.

These products work best IN ANTICIPATION of allergic triggers- once symptoms have begun, histamine has already been released in the body and your child may not fully respond to the anti-histamine. They should be used daily during allergy season for peak effectiveness, but can be used on an as-needed basis for specific exposures (i.e. exposure to a cat.)

Claritin-D and **Zyrtec-D** are antihistamines paired with **pseudoephedrine (Sudafed)**, a decongestant that helps shrink congested blood vessels in the nose.

For EYE symptoms you can purchase over-the-counter **Naphcon** or **Opcon**, anti-histamine eye drops or **Zaditor**, and anti-histamine eye drop that also contains an ingredient to prevent histamine release.

If the over-the-counter products are not working for your child, or have significant side effects, schedule a visit for an evaluation by the doctor. Underlying issues such as sinus infections can be treated, and prescription medications or eye drops can be tried.

SINGULAIR:

Singulair is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication that blocks leukotrienes, chemicals that cause inflammation. Singulair is taken as granules (sprinkled in food), pills or chewables, and is effective for both asthma and allergy symptoms. This medication should be taken daily throughout the allergy season for peak effectiveness.

This medication does not cause drowsiness or jitteriness, and is typically well-tolerated by children ages 1 and older.

ANTI-HISTAMINE nasal sprays:

Over the counter decongestant sprays such as **Neosynephrine** and **Afrin** cannot be used frequently, due to the risk of “rebound” (or worsened symptoms) when discontinued. So do not use it for more than 3 days in a row.

Prescription antihistamine sprays such as **Astelin**, **Astepro** and **Patanase** can be used chronically without risk. They can be particularly helpful in relieving congestion due to cold symptoms and cold weather induced rhinitis, in addition to allergies.

STEROID nasal sprays:

Intranasal steroid sprays are one of the most effective treatments for allergic rhinitis, but must be used consistently for best effect.

To use a nasal spray properly, first lean forward (nose towards the toes). Use the left hand to spray the right nostril, and the right hand to spray the left nostril. Then place the nozzle in the nostril, aiming for the eye on the same side to avoid spraying the septum (middle part of the nose that can develop bleeding.)

Some brands commonly used are **Flonase** (fluticasone), **Nasonex** (mometasone), **Rhinocort Aqua** (budesonide) and **Veramyst** (fluticasone furoate.)

HELPFUL WEBSITES:

<http://www.aaaai.org> (the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology)

<http://www.aanma.org> (Allergy & Asthma Network Mothers of Asthmatics)

<http://www.noattacks.org> (Web site hosted by the Environmental Protection Agency)

<http://www.cdc.gov/health/asthma.htm> (Centers for Disease Control Website)

<http://www.singulair.com> (A prescription non-steroidal medication for asthma and allergy)