



FEATURE ARTICLE FROM ALWAYS BEST CARE

Your Nose Knows: Dealing with Seasonal Allergies

A late spring quickly followed by summer in much of the country could mean a double whammy for those suffering from seasonal allergies, as both summer and spring pollen hit at the same time. Seniors may have a more difficult time than younger people for several reasons: Antihistamine medicine, which alleviates the effects of allergies can interfere with other drugs. Seniors often take multiple medications, and mixing them with antihistamines can cause potentially dangerous reactions, increase blood pressure and cause drowsiness and dizziness.

Also, as people age, their immune system's defenses often become weaker, and conditions such as congestive heart failure and sleep apnea can intensify allergies and make a person ill. Before using an over-the-counter allergy medicine, talk to your physician or pharmacist.

Symptoms and Standard Treatments

How do you know you're suffering from an allergy? Symptoms include a runny/stuffy nose; sore, itchy eyes/nose/throat; frequent sinus symptoms, frequent respiratory infections and laryngitis/hoarse voice.

Over-the-counter allergy treatments are designed to alleviate symptoms. The most common ones are:

- Antihistamines
- Decongestants
- Nasal spray decongestants (which should not be used for more than three days)
- Cromolyn sodium nasal spray
- Eye drops
- Nasal irrigation

If over-the-counter remedies don't help, your doctor may recommend a prescription medication:

- Corticosteroid nasal sprays
- Leukotriene receptor antagonists (LTRAs) such as Singulair
- Atrovent (ipratropium bromide) nasal spray
- Allergy shots

Causes of Allergies

Seasonal allergies result from tree, grass and weed pollen, which attach to soft mucous membranes in our bronchial and nasal passages. These membranes contain immune cells that have histamines. When pollen (or another allergen trigger such as mold) land on these cells, they release histamine, which the body tries to get rid of through sneezing, watery eyes, coughing and other means.

Notorious pollen carriers include ragweed (which often shows up later in the summer), Russian thistle, sagebrush, Bermuda grass and blue grasses.

People with serious breathing disorders, such as asthma, may find it difficult to inhale because histamines can cause swelling in bronchial tubes. Summer air pollution, which irritates the respiratory tract, can make allergy symptoms worse for city dwellers. Ozone, created by mixing sunlight, nitrogen oxide and hydrocarbons from burning fuel, is often more prevalent in the summer due to stronger sunlight and calmer winds. Ozone and allergens combine to worsen breathing problems.

Natural Remedies

For those who want to avoid the sleepiness that comes with antihistamines, several herbs are being touted as alternatives, especially the European herb butterbur, a common weed in Europe used to wrap butter in the days before refrigeration. Two herbal supplements inhibit the body's ability to produce histamines. Stinging nettle, a common weed that is painful to the touch, is best taken as a freeze-dried extract of the leaves and sold in capsules. Quercetin is a type of bioflavonoid, a natural plant-derived compound present in citrus fruits, onions, apples, parsley, tea, tomatoes, broccoli, lettuce and wine. In supplement form, this compound has a recommended dosage of 1,000 milligrams per day.

Eating Right

Eating the right foods (and avoiding others) can also help alleviate allergy symptoms. Hot, spicy food thins mucous secretions, which in turn clears nasal passages. Recommended spices include cayenne pepper, hot ginger and fenugreek, as well as onion and garlic. At the same time, you should avoid foods to which you are sensitive, as food intolerance can cripple your immune system and worsen seasonal allergies.

A German study, published in the journal *Allergy*, found that participants who ate foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids were less likely to suffer allergy symptoms than those who didn't eat these foods regularly, according to [Mother Earth News](#). Omega-3s, which help fight inflammation, can be found in cold-water fish, walnuts and flaxseed oil, as well as grass-fed meat and eggs. To relieve allergy symptoms, nutritionists also recommend apples, ginger, leafy green vegetables and foods rich in vitamin C.

A New York University allergist, Clifford Bassett, suggests avoiding melon, banana, cucumber, sunflower seeds, chamomile and any herbal supplements containing echinacea, all of which can intensify pollen allergy symptoms. Natural supplements can be toxic, especially when combined with traditional drugs, so experts recommend consulting your doctor prior to taking any herb.

Perhaps the best prevention for seasonal allergies is staying indoors when pollen levels are high. If you do go out, wait until the rain stops, because the downpour washes away a lot of the pollen. Many newspapers publish daily pollen levels, and the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology's [National Allergy Bureau \(NAB\)](#) features a nationwide map showing pollen and mold levels. You can even zoom into your area for up-to-date information and create a personalized email alert account through My NAB. See other suggestions for relief from seasonal allergies in the sidebar.

Measures to Take During Allergy Season

To help reduce seasonal allergy symptoms:

- Avoid using window fans to cool rooms, because they can draw in pollen.
- Keep windows closed, both at home and when driving, whenever possible, to keep allergens out.
- Clean your home's air filters often. Dust bookshelves, vents and other places where pollen can collect.
- Wash bedding and rugs in hot water to eliminate dust mites and other allergens.
- Wash your hair, take a shower and change clothing after going outside.
- Vacuum often and wear a mask to avoid breathing pollen, mold and dust trapped in your carpet. Use a vacuum that has a HEPA filter.
- Wear a paper respiratory mask when you mow or rake your lawn to avoid grass pollen.
- Wear sunglasses outside, which can prevent pollen and other seasonal irritants from getting in your eyes.

- Avoid grassy expanses (especially just-mowed areas) or spaces with a lot of foliage.
- Use an air conditioner and a dehumidifier to keep the air in your home cool, clean and dry.
- Plan trips to low-pollen-count areas, like the beach, rather than the mountains.

Sources:

[About.com, "Coping With Seasonal Allergies"](#)

[Chicago Tribune, "Allergies can strike at any stage in life," Aug. 3, 2012](#)

[WebMD, "Summer Allergies"](#)

[WebMD, "Relieve Allergies the Natural Way"](#)

[Mother Earth News, "6 Natural Allergy Remedies"](#)

[St. Charles Community, "Seasonal Allergies & the Elderly"](#)

[Examiner.com, "Seniors and Seasonal Allergies"](#)

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