

MEDfacts

An Educational Health Series From National Jewish Health®



ALLERGIES TO POLLEN

Facts About Allergies

The tendency to develop allergies may be inherited. If you have allergic tendencies and are exposed to certain things in your environment (allergens), you may develop allergies to some of those things. Examples of allergy symptoms include itchy eyes, runny nose, asthma symptoms, eczema and rash. The timing of the allergic response may be immediate or delayed. Allergy testing may be recommended to help identify your allergies.

Allergies to Pollen

Pollen from trees, grasses and weeds can be inhaled, and cause allergy and asthma symptoms. Pollen may travel many miles in the wind. Therefore, trees, grasses and weeds in your general area can cause allergy and asthma symptoms.

Pollen allergies are often seasonal. Allergy and asthma symptoms occur when the amount of pollen in the air is high. Pollens from trees tend to be highest in the spring. Pollens from grasses tend to be highest in the summer. Pollens from weeds tend to be highest in the fall. This may vary depending on weather conditions and where you live.

Environmental Control

Once an allergy has been identified, the next step is to decrease or eliminate exposure to the allergen. This is called environmental control. Evidence shows that allergy and asthma symptoms may improve over time, if the recommended environmental control changes are made. Many of the changes are for the entire home. The bedroom is the most important, because the bedroom is where people usually spend 1/3 to 1/2 of their time.

The key to eliminating or reducing exposure to pollen is to keep outside air out, or filter it before it comes inside.

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Steps to Control Pollen Allergens

- If possible, keep windows and outside doors shut during pollen season, especially during the daytime. This is important when pollen and mold counts are high. These counts are often reported on the TV news and in the newspaper.
- If you have central or room air conditioning, use it to allow you to keep windows and outside doors shut. Avoid using fans that bring in the outside air.
- Use of swamp coolers is discouraged because of the increased potential for dust mite and mold growth, which both thrive in humidity.
- Consider the pollen counts when planning outdoor activities. It may help to limit your outdoor activities during the times of highest pollen and mold counts.
- Encourage hand washing after outdoor play to avoid transferring pollen from the hands to the eyes and nose. If you are outdoors during high pollen counts, take a shower and wash your hair and leave the clothes in the laundry room if you are having allergy symptoms.
- Outdoor activities may be better tolerated after a gentle, sustained rain.
- Dry laundry in a dryer only. Avoid hanging clothes outside to dry.
- Drive with the windows closed. If it is hot, use your air conditioning.
- Keep pets that spend time outdoors out of the bedroom. In addition to animal dander allergens, they may carry and deposit pollen stuck to their fur.

Other Helpful Suggestions

Consider buying an air filtration device such as an ionic air cleaner, or "HEPA" air cleaner to remove pollen from the air inside your house.

Your health care provider may recommend additional medications, therapies or other environmental controls. Exposure to pollen can make allergy, asthma and/or eczema symptoms worse in some people. To avoid these problems follow the above steps to decrease or eliminate exposure.

Note: This information is provided to you as an educational service of National Jewish. It is not meant to be a substitute for consulting with your own physician.

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