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April 4, 2011

WELLNESS WEEKLY

ALLERGIES

This time of year is what we normally think of when it comes to seasonal allergies. As the trees bloom and the pollen gets airborne, allergy sufferers begin their annual ritual of sniffing and sneezing. Although there is no magical cure for spring allergies, there are a number of ways to combat them, from medication to household habits.

The biggest spring allergy trigger is pollen -- tiny grains released into the air by trees, grasses, and weeds for the purpose of fertilizing other plants. When pollen grains get into the nose of someone who's allergic, they send the immune system into overdrive.

The immune system, mistakenly seeing the pollen as foreign invaders, releases antibodies -- substances that normally identify and attack bacteria, viruses, and other illness-causing organisms. The antibodies attack the allergens, which leads to the release of chemicals called histamines into the blood. Histamines trigger the runny nose, itchy eyes, and other symptoms of allergies.

Allergy symptoms tend to be particularly high on breezy days when the wind picks up pollen and carries it through the air. Rainy days, on the other hand, cause a drop in the pollen counts because the rain washes away the allergens.

10 Most Common Allergy Triggers

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| 1. Pollen | 6. Insect Stings |
| 2. Animal Dander | 7. Latex |
| 3. Dust Mites | 8. Medication |
| 4. Molds | 9. Fragrance |
| 5. Food | 10. Cockroaches |



Spring allergy symptoms include:

- Runny nose
- Watery eyes
- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Itchy eyes and nose
- Dark circles under the eyes

If you've never been formally diagnosed with allergies but you notice that your eyes and nose are itchy and runny during the spring months, see your doctor. Your doctor may refer you to an allergist for tests.

How to manage allergies using over-the-counter medication

Spring allergy relief is within your reach -- on your local drugstore's shelves. Allegra (fexofenadine), a popular non-sedating prescription antihistamine, is now available over-the-counter and without a prescription. For many allergy sufferers, this is great news. Allegra provides another antihistamine choice, along with Claritin and Zyrtec, for the treatment of allergy symptoms. Other recommendations include a saline nasal rinse or oral decongestant pill (if you don't have high blood pressure) if your nose remains congested. You can also take a long-acting decongestant nose spray for a few days, if necessary. If these treatments don't clear your nasal congestion, ask your doctor about adding a corticosteroid nose spray.