

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ALLERGIES

Is it a cold or is it allergy?

Sometimes it's difficult to tell. Allergy symptoms typically include sneezing, runny nose, nasal and sinus congestion, sinus headache, fatigue and itching of the eyes. Cold symptoms are due to virus infections. Cold viruses produce symptoms of runny nose, sinus congestion and headache and may also be associated with occasional fever, chills and muscle aches. However, viruses do not produce itching symptoms at all. In short, allergy does not produce fever and colds do not produce itching. Normally, cold symptoms last 3 to 7 days. This means that if your symptoms of runny nose, sneezing and sinus congestion last for more than 7 days, you are more likely to have allergy or bacterial infection as the cause for your symptoms.

Seasonal hay fever, otherwise known as **allergic rhinitis**, causes itching of the eyes, sneezing, itching of the roof of the mouth, nasal congestion, sinus headaches and fatigue.

Airborne pollen and mold spores are common causes of seasonal hay fever symptoms. Avoidance of these sources of hay fever is most important in preventing the allergy and asthma symptoms.

The easiest way to avoid these outdoor airborne sources of allergy is to not go outside. However, this is impractical for most of us. So, when outside, you should drive your car with the windows up and the air conditioning on. Driving with the windows down turns your car into a pollen collector. At home keep the windows closed and the central air conditioning running. Air conditioning removes the pollen and mold spores from the air and may thereby reduce your chances of experiencing allergy and asthma attacks. The best way to reduce your indoor mold spore exposure is to reduce indoor humidity by running your air conditioner or dehumidifier during the high humidity seasons.

Pollen from weeds, trees and grasses may travel several hundred miles in the air. Therefore, it may not be your neighbor's yard or tree that is a source of your hay fever or asthma symptoms. African tree pollens, for example, have been identified in the air over Florida.

Try to time your outdoor activities so that you are outside when the pollen and mold levels are at their minimum. Grass pollinates in the early morning hours between 6 and 10 AM. So, if you are going to exercise outside do it in the early afternoon. Windy days will have higher pollen and mold allergen levels. You may wish to stay indoors on windy days. Outdoor activities for allergy sufferers are best during calm days. Weeds pollinate at sunrise and sundown as air currents turn over. If you are allergic to weed pollen, calm mid-day activities should be best for you.

Indoor allergens which are most often responsible for causing hay fever, sinus and asthma symptoms include the house dust mite, cockroach allergenic proteins, animal dander (cat, dog, guinea pig, hamster, rabbit, etc.), and mold spores.

Families who have the genetic predisposition toward the development of allergy and asthma symptoms should not have indoor pets. Also, these families should not have wall-to-wall carpeting in their homes due to the fact that the carpeting retains indoor allergens such as the house dust mite proteins. Also, wall-to-wall carpeting will provide an ideal nest for the house dust mites and molds to live in. Therefore, the allergy family home should be animal and carpet free.

Sinus is an old Roman word which means "sewer". Humans have these sewers, or sinuses, to help humidify and warm the air which is taken into the lungs. Sinus headaches and sinus infections in the language of physicians are termed sinusitis. Sinusitis means inflammation of the sinuses. Infections of the sinuses frequently follow flare-ups of allergy since allergy immune reactions produce excessive mucus in the nose, sinus and middle ear.

Millions of Americans obtain relief on their own by purchasing over-the-counter antihistamines and decongestants to relieve the sinus headache symptoms. However, if the sinus headache and drainage down the back of the throat continue or are associated with fever, you should consult with your doctor.