

Seasonal Allergies

Brown Health Services Patient Education Series

What is hay fever/seasonal allergies?

Seasonal allergies are a group of conditions that can cause sneezing, a stuffy or runny nose, and itchy eyes. Seasonal allergies are sometimes called "hay fever." Many people first get seasonal allergies when they are children or young adults. Seasonal allergies are lifelong, but symptoms can get better or worse over time. Seasonal allergies sometimes run in families.

Symptoms occur only at certain times of the year. Most seasonal allergies are caused by:

- Pollens from trees, grasses, or weeds
- Mold spores, which grow when the weather is humid, wet, or damp conditions.

Mold also grows on dead leaves and releases spores into the air. You may be allergic to all molds, or just to molds that are present during one particular season.

What are the symptoms of seasonal allergies?

Symptoms of seasonal allergies can include:

- Stuffy nose, runny nose, or sneezing a lot
- Itchy or red eyes
- Sore throat, or itching of the throat or ears
- Waking up at night or trouble sleeping, which can lead to feeling tired during the day

How is it diagnosed?

- Symptom assessment and physical exam of ear, nose and throat.
- Allergy skin or blood testing by an Allergist.

Treatment

Note: Avoiding or minimizing exposure to the allergen is the best way to reduce symptoms.

- **Nose rinses** – Rinsing out the nose with salt water cleans the inside of the nose and gets rid of pollen in the nose. Different devices can be used to rinse the nose.
- **Steroid nose sprays** – Steroid nose sprays work best if you use them every day, and it can take a few days for them to work fully. Steroid nose sprays are more effective than other allergy medicines for stuffy nose and post-nasal drip (which is when mucus runs down the back of your throat).
- **Antihistamines** – These medicines help stop itching, sneezing, and runny nose symptoms. They don't treat stuffy noses as well as steroid nose sprays. Some antihistamines can make people feel tired.
- **Antihistamine eye drops** – These medicines are available without a prescription. They can help with eyes that feel itchy or gritty.
- **Decongestants** – These medicines can reduce stuffy nose symptoms. People with certain health problems, such as high blood pressure, should not take decongestants. Also, people should not use decongestant nose sprays for more than 3 days in a row. Using these nose sprays for more than 3 days in a row can make symptoms worse.

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- **Allergy shots** – Some people with seasonal allergies choose to get allergy shots. Usually, allergy shots are given every week or month by an allergy doctor or by a Nurse. They contain tiny amounts of allergens, such as pollen. Many people find that this treatment reduces their symptoms, but it can take months to work.
- **Allergy pills (under the tongue)** – For some types of pollen allergies, there are pills that work much like allergy shots. These pills need to be prescribed by a doctor. They are made to dissolve under the tongue. They are taken every day for several months of the year.

The goals of treatment are to make you feel more comfortable, function better and prevent secondary infections of the ear and sinus or reactive airway problems.