
HAY FEVER

For millions of people living in America, the warmer weather signals the beginning of spring, as well as the beginning of allergy season. An allergy is an overreaction to a normally harmless substance known as an “allergen”. In an effort to rid the body of the “allergen”, the immune system releases many chemicals, one of which is called “histamine”. As a result, sneezing, runny, or stuffy nose, itchy and watery eyes can occur.

Seasonal allergy sufferers are often allergic to airborne pollens from a variety of trees, grasses and weeds. These people are commonly known to suffer from “Hay Fever”, even though the condition has nothing to do with hay and rarely produces a fever.

Trees generally shed pollen in the spring, grasses in the early summer and weeds in the late summer. In the San Francisco area, the most common allergens are from tree pollens (Juniper, Cedar and Cypress commonly found in Golden Gate Park, the Presidio and Portsmouth Square), and grass pollens (Blue, Brome, Velvet, Rye, Sweet Vernal and Timothy). The colorful Acacia and fragrant Eucalyptus trees along streets and highways may also cause hay fever.

Diagnosis

A combination of a detailed diary of your symptoms and when and where they occur, as well as allergy skin tests, performed by an allergist, can

help determine the source of your allergies.

Tips for Relief From Hay Fever

The best way to fight a seasonal allergy is to minimize your exposure to the substance that causes it. Here are some simple measures you can take:

1. Stay indoors as much as possible, especially on windy days.
2. Keep the doors and windows in your house and car closed. Use an air-purifier which filters out pollen and change the filter frequently.
3. Avoid yard-work which stirs up pollen and molds.
4. Minimize outdoor activities in the early morning (before 10:00a.m.) when pollen counts are usually highest.
5. Exercise outdoors in the evening when pollen counts are lowest or exercise indoors.

Allergy Relief Medicines

The use of “Allergy Relief Medicines” can also ease some of the symptoms. Your doctor or allergy specialist can prescribe the appropriate medications for you. **DO NOT** take any over-the-counter drugs made in China or the U.S.A. without seeking advice from your physician first. These medicines all have potential side effects. This is especially important if you are pregnant or have chronic health problems, such as high blood pressure or heart disease.

The following are some common over-the-counter and prescription allergy medications:

1. **ANTIHISTAMINES** reduce itching and sneezing. Potential side effects include drowsiness, dizziness and dry mouth. **AVOID** driving or operation of machinery when taking these drugs. Newer non-sedating (non-drowsy) antihistamines are also available by prescription.
2. **DECONGESTANTS** reduce swelling of nasal passages to restore free breathing. Potential side effects include irritability, nervousness and insomnia.
AVOID OVER-THE-COUNTER nasal sprays as they can cause “rebound congestion”, worsen stuffiness and damage nasal membranes.
3. **PRESCRIPTION NASAL SPRAYS** prevent release of histamine. Potential side effects include minor nasal irritation. These medications usually take more than a week to reach full effectiveness.
4. **STEROIDS** (oral or by injection) reduce nasal and sinus inflammation. This form of treatment should be taken only under a doctor's direction, as it carries many serious risks and side effects.

If these medications do not provide adequate relief, **Immunotherapy** (in the form of **Allergy Shots**) is helpful for long-term alleviation. This

involves periodic injections of tiny amounts of the offending allergen. This low-level exposure gradually desensitizes a person from the effects of the allergen. This treatment works particularly well against allergies to pollens, dust mites, and molds.

Even though there is no cure for “Hay Fever” or allergies, relief is available. Ask your doctor or allergy specialist about them.

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