

Tips to Survive Seasonal Allergies

The sneezing, runny nose and watery eyes of seasonal allergies may not threaten lives, but for the estimated 35 million Americans who are allergic to airborne pollens,* the cost of allergies runs high. In addition to lost work and school days, diminished productivity and general misery attributed to seasonal allergies, Americans spend \$11 billion on doctors' visits, prescription medications and other allergy treatments, according to a study by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

But by minimizing exposure to allergens (the substances that cause your body's immune system response) and managing the symptoms, you can improve your quality of life. These tips can help.

Control Indoor Air Quality

- Dust and vacuum regularly, and consider wearing a mask when cleaning.
- Keep pollen out by closing windows and using the air conditioner whenever possible.
- Change air filters often or install an air purifier.
- Wash bedding in hot water frequently.
- Remove houseplants, which can accumulate mold, and regularly clean shower curtains and other damp areas.
- Run a dehumidifier to help keep allergens out of the air.

Enjoy the Outdoors Wisely

- Stay inside during peak pollen hours, usually early morning and late afternoon, and when the weather is windy and dry.
- Remove shoes and outer layers of clothing before coming inside.
- Shower after being outside to rinse pollen from your hair.
- Consider banning pets from your bed and couch – their fur can be a magnet for pollen

Seek Treatment

In addition to avoiding allergens, medications can help control the symptoms of seasonal allergies. Antihistamines can relieve itching, sneezing and runny nose, and are available both over-the-counter and by prescription.** Decongestants offer short-term relief from congestion, but may elevate blood pressure or worsen prostate problems. Nasal corticosteroids can be effective when other treatments fail, and are available by prescription only. Talk with your provider about medications that are right for you

Allergen immunotherapy, or allergy shots, can desensitize your body to the allergen and offer long-term relief from symptoms. Once your provider has identified the allergen and determined that you cannot avoid it, the shots are delivered on a regular schedule until your body no longer reacts to the allergen.

Leading a healthy lifestyle – exercising daily, avoiding air pollutants such as cigarette smoke and eating a balanced diet – can also help manage symptoms. To learn more about how you can find relief from seasonal allergies, make an appointment with a Cumberland Healthcare Family Practice Provider by calling (715) 822-2231.

* Source: Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, www.aafa.org.

** Over-the-counter antihistamines are not recommended for children under 2.