

Allergies

A L L E R G I E S

An allergy is when your body reacts to something that does not bother most other people. For example, they may have a reaction to pollen, mold, dust mites, pet dander, food or medication. When they come in contact with these things their immune system releases chemicals such as histamine. These chemicals are responsible for their symptoms. People can be allergic to many different things, such as:

- pets
- foods
- dust mites
- mold
- latex rubber
- pollen

About 35 million Americans suffer from allergies to pollen. (Pollen is a powder made by flowering plants and trees.) Pollen allergy is also known as hay fever. It is one of the most common allergies. When we think of hay fever, we think of spring. But pollen grains can be in the air in the spring, summer, and fall. It just depends on the type of tree, grass, or weed.

Why do some people have allergies?

- Some people get allergies from their parents. Children are much more likely to have allergies if their parents do. Also people seem to get allergies if they are exposed to the things that bother them when the body's defenses are low or weak. This can happen when they are ill or pregnant, for example.

Symptoms of Allergies

- Sneezing often with a runny or clogged nose
- Coughing
- Itching eyes, nose, and throat
- Dark circles under the eyes
- Watering eyes
- Red, swollen eyes, and crusting of the eyelids
- Itchy skin or hives

What kinds of tests check for allergies?

The two main types of allergy tests are:

- Skin tests — A pin is used to inject a small amount of allergen into your skin.
- Blood tests — Doctors study a small sample of your blood.

Both tests look for certain disease-fighting cells (antibodies). Your body makes these cells to match whatever it is fighting. Your antibodies tell doctors what you are allergic to.

Allergies (cont.)

How are allergies treated?

There is no cure for allergies. So people just have to learn to cope with them. Here are some choices for dealing with them:

- Avoid the things that trigger allergies. (This is the best treatment.)
- Use over-the-counter and prescription drugs
- Get allergy shots
- Use nasal sprays
- Use air conditioners and filters

Allergies vs. Colds

	Allergies	Colds
Symptoms	Running or stuffed nose, sneezing, wheezing, watery and itchy eyes	Can include fever and aches and pains along with allergy symptoms
Warning Time	Symptoms begin right after you are exposed	Usually takes a few days
Duration	Symptoms last as long as you are around the allergen	Symptoms should clear up within several days to a week.

Should I move to another part of the country?

- Doctors most likely will not suggest you move. Most people with allergies will still develop an allergy to the plant pollens in the new area, anyway.

To Learn More...

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology
1-800-822-2762 (1-800-822-ASMA) <http://www.aaaai.org>

For information on air-cleaning devices:
Environmental Protection Agency
1-800-438-4318
<http://www.epa.gov>

FDA/Office of Women's Health www.fda.gov/womens