

Allergic Rhinitis



What is allergic rhinitis?

Allergic rhinitis (also called “hay fever”) happens when you breathe in something you are allergic to, and the inside of your nose becomes inflamed or swollen. Allergic rhinitis affects 40 million people in the United States.

What are the signs and symptoms of allergic rhinitis?

Signs of allergic rhinitis are similar to signs of a common cold. But, unlike common cold symptoms, allergic rhinitis can last for more than 8-10 days and may include:

- A stuffy nose or a runny nose.
- Sneezing.
- Itchy nose, itchy eyes or watery eyes.
- Children who have allergic rhinitis might have dark circles under their eyes, or use the palm of their hand to push their nose up as they try to stop the itching (called the “allergic salute”).
- Coughing caused by clear mucus running down the back of your throat.

What causes my allergic rhinitis?

Allergic rhinitis is caused by things that trigger allergies, called *allergens*. These allergens can be found both outdoors and indoors. When allergic rhinitis is caused by common outdoor allergens—such as mold or trees, grass and weed pollens—it is often referred to as seasonal allergies, or “hay fever.”

Allergic rhinitis may also be triggered by allergens that are in your house, such as animal dander (tiny skin flakes and saliva), indoor mold, or the droppings of cockroaches or house dust mites—tiny creatures found in the home.

- If you have symptoms in spring, you are probably allergic to tree pollens.
- If you have symptoms in the summer, you are probably allergic to grass and weed pollens.
- If you have symptoms in late summer and fall, you probably are allergic to ragweed.
- Dust mites, molds and animal dander (saliva or skin flakes) cause symptoms all year.

An allergist/immunologist can perform skin tests to decide for sure which allergens cause your symptoms.



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What are my treatment choices?

Antihistamines and nose sprays that you buy at the store can help at first, but they can have unpleasant side effects. These antihistamines can make you tired and the nasal sprays can make your stuffiness worse. Nose sprays and antihistamines that your doctor prescribes are a different type of medicine and are very helpful for controlling symptoms. Some are safe for young children and all are safe for adults.

Your allergist/immunologist will determine the medicine and treatment that is right for you.

What are allergy shots?

For some patients, allergy shots, also called immunotherapy, are very helpful, and safe. Allergy shots help how your body handles allergens.

Your doctor may talk to you about allergy shots if your allergy symptoms are bad or very bad, if they happen for most of the year, if they do not respond well to medicine, and if they happen when you are around allergens that are hard to avoid, such as flower pollens or house dust mites.

Can I do anything to avoid getting allergic rhinitis?

You can change some things in your house that might make your symptoms better:

- Although it's best not to have pets when you have allergic rhinitis, washing your furry pet once a week and keeping it out of the bedroom and off the furniture will help.
- Put pillows, boxsprings and mattresses in sealed plastic covers that keep out dust mites, and wash sheets in hot water every week. Washing machines at the Laundromat will have hot enough water to kill the dust mites.
- Keep windows closed. If possible, get an air conditioner and run a dehumidifier, so that there will not be so many pollens and molds in the house.

An allergist/immunologist can answer other questions you might have about allergic rhinitis. Visit www.aaaai.org for more educational materials on allergic rhinitis.



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