

eHouseCall

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A Monthly Electronic Newsletter from HealthLink

Doctor's Bag



by Robert Sorrenti, MD
Chief Medical Officer

IS IT AN ALLERGY OR A COLD?

Many people mistake allergies for colds and vice versa. Left untreated, allergies can cause serious conditions such as sinus and ear infections.

The main difference between a cold and an allergy is that allergy symptoms typically last longer. Otherwise, it's pretty hard to tell them apart. Here are a few guidelines that may help you tell the difference:

Symptoms

Symptoms of allergies include runny or stuffed nose, sneezing, wheezing, watery and itchy eyes. You might have a cold if you experience any of the above plus fever, aches and pains.

Onset

If you are allergic, symptoms begin almost immediately after exposure. Colds usually take a few days to produce symptoms.

Duration

Without treatment, allergic symptoms can last as long as you are exposed to the allergen. If the allergen is present year-round, your symptoms may be chronic. Colds typically clear up in about a week.

When to Call the Doctor

Anyone who experiences any respiratory illness that lasts longer than a week or two should consult a doctor. For many patients, allergies can be controlled by medications and/or immunotherapy, or a series of allergy shots. Your doctor will work with you to establish a treatment plan that meets your lifestyle and provides relief.

HLInfo YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO HEALTH CARE AWARENESS

MAY

SPRING IS IN THE AIR

Pollen allergy, commonly called hay fever, is one of the most common chronic diseases in the United States. According to The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious diseases, scientists think that some people inherit a tendency to be allergic from one or both parents.



What is pollen?

Plants produce tiny round or oval pollen grains in order to reproduce. In some species, the plant uses the pollen from its own flowers to fertilize itself. Other types must be cross-pollinated; for fertilization to occur, pollen must be transferred from the flower of one plant to that of another of the same species. Insects do the job for some plants, while others rely on the wind for transport.

What is a "pollen count?"

A pollen count is a measure of how much pollen is in the air. This count represents the concentration of all the pollen (or of one particular type, like ragweed) in the air in a certain area at a specific time. It is shown in grains of pollen per square meter of air collected in 24 hours. Pollen counts tend to be highest early in the morning on warm, dry, breezy days and lowest during wet, chilly periods.

How to avoid hay fever

Moving to a place where the offending allergens do not grow is not always the answer. People allergic to ragweed may leave their ragweed-ridden communities and relocate to areas where ragweed does not grow, only to develop allergies to other weeds or even to grasses or trees in their new surroundings. Allergy specialists typically do not encourage this approach. Here are some more realistic options for reducing exposure to offending pollens:

- ◆ Remain indoors with the windows closed in the morning when the outdoor pollen levels are highest. Sunny, windy days can be especially troublesome.
- ◆ Wear a face mask designed to filter pollen out of the air and keep it from reaching nasal passages, if you must be outdoors.
- ◆ Take your vacation at the height of the expected pollination period and choose a location where such exposure would be minimal.

DidUKnow?

- ◆ Some 35 million Americans suffer from upper respiratory tract symptoms that are allergic reactions to airborne allergens.
- ◆ Some people with allergic rhinitis have seen their symptoms drop significantly within 12 months of starting immunotherapy. Check with your doctor to see if immunotherapy might be appropriate for you.
- ◆ The respiratory symptoms of asthma, which affect approximately 11 million Americans, are often provoked by airborne allergens.
- ◆ A single ragweed plant can generate a million grains of pollen a day.

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA) news release, "Spring Allergy Capitals 2007", lists the following cities as the top ten offenders:

1. Tulsa OK
2. Dallas-Fort Worth TX
3. Fort Myers FL
4. San Antonio TX
5. Tucson AZ
6. St. Louis MO
7. Wichita KA
8. Little Rock AR
9. Charlotte NC
10. Atlanta GA

The AAFA based its ratings on three factors: seasonal pollen counts; allergy medicine use per patient; and the number of board-certified allergists per patient.

Newsletter Information Sources

Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America: "Spring Allergy Capitals 2007." News release, Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. Overview;" American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology, (www.aaaai.org); U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Public Health Service National Institutes of Health; eMedTV "Health Information Brought to Life" (allergies.emedtv.com); National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Institute of Health (www.niaid.nih.gov)

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