



PARISH NURSE MINISTRY NOTES



SPRING ALLERGIES Part 1

Spring is the time of year for seasonal allergies. As the trees start to bloom and the pollen is released into the atmosphere, allergy sufferers begin their annual ritual of sniffing and sneezing. Each year, 58 million Americans fall prey to seasonal allergic rhinitis, more commonly known as hay fever. Although there is no magical cure for spring allergies, there are a number of ways to combat them, from medication to household habits.

What causes spring allergies?

The biggest spring allergy trigger is pollen, tiny grains released into the air by trees, grasses, and weeds for the purpose of fertilizing other plants. When pollen grains get into the nose of someone who's allergic, they send the immune system into overdrive. The immune system, mistakenly seeing the pollen as foreign invaders, releases antibodies, which are substances that normally identify and attack bacteria, viruses, and other illness-causing organisms. The antibodies attack the allergens, which leads to the release of chemicals called histamines into the blood. Histamines trigger the runny nose, itchy eyes, and other symptoms of allergies.

Pollen can travel for miles, spreading a path of misery for allergy sufferers along the way. The higher the pollen count, the greater the misery. The pollen count measures the amount of allergens in the air in

grains per cubic meter. You can find out the daily pollen count in your area by watching your local weather forecast. Here are some of the biggest spring allergy offenders:

Trees: Alder, Ash, Aspen, Beech, Box Elder, Cedar, Cottonwood, Cypress, Elm, Hickory, Juniper, Maple, Mulberry, Oak, Olive, Palm, Pine, Poplar, Sycamore and Willow.

Grasses and Weeds: Bermuda, Fescue, Johnson, June, Orchard, Perennial Rye, Redtop, Saltgrass, Sweet Vernal and Timothy.

Allergy symptoms tend to be particularly high on breezy days when the wind picks up pollen and carries it through the air. Rainy days, on the other hand, cause a drop in the pollen counts, because rain washes away the allergens.

What are the symptoms of spring allergies?

The symptoms of spring allergies include runny nose, watery eyes, sneezing, coughing, itchy eyes and nose, and dark circles under the eyes.

How are spring allergies diagnosed?

If you've never been formally diagnosed with spring allergies but notice that your eyes and nose are itchy and runny during the spring months, see your doctor. Your doctor may refer you to an allergist for tests.

Next week, you will read about treatment and management of spring allergies.

Spring Allergies

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COLD?

Know the difference to provide effective relief for your children





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SPRING ALLERGIES Part 2



What is the treatment for spring allergies?

Doctors treat spring allergies with a number of over-the-counter and prescription drugs. Over-the-

counter allergy drugs are effective for many people. Antihistamines reduce sneezing, sniffing and itching by lowering the amount of histamine (the substance produced during an allergic reaction) in the body. Decongestants shrink the blood vessels in the nasal passageways to relieve congestion and swelling. Antihistamine/decongestants combine the effects of both drugs. Nasal spray decongestants relieve congestion and may clear clogged nasal passages faster than oral decongestants without the same side effects. Steroid nasal sprays reduce inflammation and are the preferred initial treatment. Only two, Nasacort and Flonase, are currently available over the counter. Cromolyn sodium nasal spray can help prevent hay fever by stopping the release of histamine before it can trigger allergy symptoms. Eye drops relieve itchy, watery eyes. Ketotifen is available over the counter.

Even though you can buy these allergy drugs without a prescription, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor first to make sure you choose the right medication. Some antihistamines can make you feel sleepy, so you need to be careful when taking them during the day. Non-drowsy formulations are also available.

Don't use over-the-counter antihistamines and decongestants for more than a few days without talking to your doctor. If over-the-counter remedies don't help allergies, your doctor may recommend a prescription medication, allergy shots, or even under-the-tongue immunotherapy tablets. Many steroid nasal sprays are available by prescription also.

TIPS So You Can
SURVIVE
Spring
ALLERGIES



Allergy shots expose the body to gradually increasing doses of the allergen until you become tolerant of it. Immunotherapy tablets placed under the tongue work

the same way. They can relieve your symptoms for a longer period of time than oral and nasal allergy medication. Although they don't work for everyone, in people who do see a response, allergy shots can stave off symptoms for a few years. Some allergy sufferers turn to natural therapies for relief.

How do you manage spring allergies?

It is nearly impossible to completely avoid spring allergies if you live in an area where plants grow. However, you can ease sniffing, sneezing, and watery eyes by avoiding your main allergy triggers. Here are a few tips:

Try to stay indoors when the pollen count is very high. Be aware that pollen counts usually peak in the morning.

Keep your doors and windows closed whenever possible during the spring months to keep allergens out. An air purifier may also help.

Clean the air filters in your home often. Also, clean bookshelves, vents, and other places in your home where pollen can collect.

Wash your hair after going outside, because pollen can collect there.

Change your pillow case frequently because pollen from your head deposits there and you continue to breathe it in while you sleep.

Vacuum twice a week or more, Wear a mask, because vacuuming can kick up pollen, mold, and dust that were trapped in your carpet.