

Message from the Parish Nurses

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June 2018

~ ALLERGIC RHINITIS ~

Spring means grass growing, flowers budding, trees blooming, and weeds to be pulled. If you sneeze a lot, if your nose is often stuffy and runny, or if your eyes, mouth or nose often feel itchy, you may have allergic rhinitis. This condition that affects 40 to 60 million Americans. Allergic rhinitis (commonly known as hay fever) can make you feel miserable. Before you settle on staying inside your air conditioned home with artificial flowers, try some simple strategies to keep seasonal allergies under control.

RHINITIS

Rhinitis can be defined as inflammation of the nasal mucosa and is generally divided into two groups:

Allergic and Non-Allergic.

- **Allergic rhinitis:** Allergen are pollen, dander, and mold.

Seasonal: Pollen from grass, trees, and weeds.

Perennial: Pet dander, mold, and dust mites.

- **Non-Allergic:** Year round symptoms of a runny nose, and nasal congestion are not caused by an allergen and does not affect the immune system.

CAUSE OF ALLERGIC RHINITIS

Allergic rhinitis develops when the body's immune system identifies a harmless substance as an intruder (allergen) which triggers the release of Histamine and is responsible for the development of the nasal symptoms.

SYMPTOMS

People with allergic rhinitis generally experience symptoms after breathing in an allergy-causing substance such as pollen or dust. In the spring, the most common triggers are grass and tree pollen. In the fall, the most common are ragweed, other weed pollens and outdoor mold.

When a sensitive person inhales an allergen, the body may react with the following symptoms:

- Stuffy nose due to blockage or congestion
- Itching in the nose, roof of the mouth, throat, or eyes
- Puffy, swollen eyelids, dark circles under the eyes
- Tearing eyes
- Sneezing, cough and fatigue

DIAGNOSIS

The most effective way to treat allergic rhinitis symptoms is to see your doctor or allergist. They may

recommend a skin test in which small amounts of suspected allergens are introduced into your skin. Skin testing is the easiest, most sensitive and generally least expensive.

TYPES OF SKIN TEST

- **Prick Test:** This test is performed first. Possible allergens are dropped on the arm and pricked with a needle. The results are known within 10-20 minutes.
- **Intradermal Test:** Done if prick test is negative. Possible allergens is injected under the skin using a thin needle. The results are known in 15-20 minutes.

MEDICATIONS

Many allergens are airborne which makes them difficult to avoid. If your symptoms can't be well-controlled by simply avoiding them, your doctor or allergist may recommend medications best suited for your symptoms and ones that are safe for you to use.

- **Topical nasal steroids/antihistamine:** These are the single most effective class for treating allergic rhinitis. They can significantly reduce nasal congestion as well as sneezing, itching, and a runny nose. Examples of over the counter medications are:
Nasal Steroids: Rhinocort, Flonase, Nascort, Nasonex.
Nasal Steroid with Antihistamine: Dymista
- **Oral Antihistamines:** These medications relieve nasal allergy symptoms such as: sneezing and itch, runny nose. Eye itching, burning, tearing and redness. Itchy skin, hives, and eczema. Examples of over the counter medications are: Claritin, Zyrtec, Allegra Allergy, and Later, Allergies, Good Morning, Morning.
- **Eye Drops:** Eye Drops may be helpful when the eyes are affected by the same allergens that trigger rhinitis. Examples of over the counter medications are: Alaway, Zaditor, Visine A
Example of prescription medication: Patanol
- **Decongestants:** Relieve the stuffiness caused by swollen nasal tissue. Example: Sudafed. Does not relieve other symptoms of rhinitis. Use for only a short time, less than seven days.

By Barbara Mueller, RN, Faith Community Nurse
More information can be found at:

<https://acaai.org/allergies/types/hay-fever-rhinitis>

Visit: www.StAgnesShepherdstown.org for "Immunotherapy" "Complementary Health Approaches" and "Environmental Control Measures". **Click on:** Parish Health Newsletter.

IMMUNOTHERAPY

Immunotherapy may be recommended for people who don't respond well to treatment with medication or who have side effects from medications. Immunotherapy helps build body's resistance to the effects of allergens. It doesn't help the symptoms produced by non-allergic rhinitis.

Two types of immunotherapy are available:

- **Allergy shots:** A treatment program, which can take 3-5 years, consists of injecting diluted allergy extract in increasing doses until a maintenance dose is reached. Then the injection schedule is changed so that the same dose is given with longer intervals between injections. As residence develops over several months, symptoms should improve.
- **Sublingual tablets:** Starting several months before allergy season begins, patient dissolve a tablet under the tongue daily. Treatment can continue for as long as 3 years. Only a few allergens (certain grass and ragweed pollen and house dust mites) can be treated now with this method, but it is a promising therapy for the future.

COMPLEMENTARY HEALTH APPROACHES

If you are considering any complementary approaches for the relief of seasonal allergy symptoms, here are some things you need to know. Information from NIH.

- **Nasal saline irrigation:** There is some good evidence that saline nasal irrigations (putting salt water into one nostril and draining it out the other) can be useful for modest improvement of allergy symptoms. Nasal irrigation is generally safe; however, neti pots and other rinsing devices must be used and cleaned properly. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, tap water that is not filtered, treated, or processed in specific ways is not safe for use as a nasal rinse.
- **Butterbur extract:** There are hints that the herb butterbur may decrease the symptoms associated with nasal allergies. However, there are concerns about its safety.
- **Honey:** Only a few studies have looked at the effects of honey on seasonal allergy symptoms, and there is no convincing scientific evidence that honey provides symptoms relief. Eating honey is generally safe; however, children under 1 year of age should not eat honey. People who are allergic to pollen or bee stings may also be allergic to honey.
- **Acupuncture:** A 2015 evaluation of 13 studies of acupuncture for allergic rhinitis, involving a total of 2,365 participants, found evidence that this approach may be helpful.

- **Probiotics:** There is some evidence that suggest that probiotics may improve some symptoms, as well as quality of life, in people with allergic rhinitis, but because probiotic formulations vary from study to study, it's difficult to make firm conclusions about its effectiveness.

- **Talk to your health care provider:** If you suffer from seasonal allergies and are considering a complementary health approach, talk to your health care provider about the best ways to manage your symptoms. You may find that when the pollen count is high, staying indoors, wearing a mask, or rinsing off when you come inside can help.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL MEASURES

Pollen:

- Stay indoors as much as possible when pollen counts are at their peak. Usually midmorning, early evening, and when the wind is blowing.
- Keep windows closed and avoid window fans.
- Use air conditioners, change/clean filters monthly.
- Wear pollen mask when mowing the lawn, gardening, or raking leaves.
- Shower and change clothes when working outside.

Mold:

- Correct areas of water damage in home.
- Dehumidify the basement.
- Use adequate ventilation in bathrooms.
- Clean floors with damp mop, rather than dry-dusting or sweeping.

Dust mites:

- Wash bedding in hot water weekly.
- Use "mite-proof" covers for pillows, box springs and mattress.

Exposure to pets:

- Wash your hands immediately after petting any animal.
- Wash your clothes after visiting friends with pets.
- If you or family member is allergic to a household pet, keep the animal outside as much as possible. If the pet must be inside keep it out of the bedroom so you are not exposed to allergens while you sleep.

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More information can be found at:

American College of Asthma, Allergy and Immunology

<https://acaai.org/allergies/types/hay-fever-rhinitis>

<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/tips/allergies>

