



What is Allergy?

The word "allergy" is a medical term that means increased or excessive sensitivity to one or a number of substances called allergens. For the hay fever sufferer, this allergen is pollen. Allergy is one type of defense our bodies have developed to protect us. Unfortunately, for the person with nasal allergies, this protection causes disturbing symptoms such as sneezing, nasal congestion, watery eyes, and an itchy nose and throat.

Allergic Rhinitis

The medical term for hay fever is "allergic rhinitis," which means inflammation of the mucous membranes of the nose caused by allergy. Allergic rhinitis occurs when an individual has a sensitivity to a substance in the air. When exposed to an airborne allergen such as pollen, the lining of the nose—the mucous membrane—becomes inflamed. This inflammation causes itchiness, sneezing, and a runny nose. Frequently, the mucous membrane swells and the nasal passages become congested.

There are two types of allergic rhinitis—seasonal and perennial. Seasonal allergies such as hay fever are caused by tree, grass, and weed pollens from springtime to frost. Perennial allergies occur year-round and are caused by common allergens such as feathers, household dust, animal dander, air pollutants, and molds.

Taking control of your allergy

Is it an allergy or a cold?

ALLERGY	COLD
Occurs repeatedly	Usually does not recur within a short time period
Usually seasonal	Can occur at any time of the year
Often involves itching and produces a great deal of clear nasal discharge	Rarely involves itching and produces cloudy or infected nasal discharge
Rarely associated with fever	Sometimes associated with fever
Often accompanied by ear and eye problems	Usually does not involve the ears and eyes

How to help yourself

- 1** Stay indoors when pollen levels are high or air quality is poor.
- 2** Avoid trips to woodland areas in seasons of high pollen production.
If you are sensitive to tree pollen, trees that may cause the greatest problems are birch (particularly New England), elm, maple, poplar, ash, oak, walnut, sycamore, and cypress. If you are sensitive to ragweed pollen, plants that may cause the greatest problems are chrysanthemums, cosmos, dahlias, daisies, zinnias, golden glow, and goldenrod.
- 3** Plan vacations during the year when pollen is lowest in that particular area.
For example, the best time to visit the Northeast is late July or early August, but try to avoid the West Coast in August.
- 4** Keep closets and basements well-aired and dry. Leave closet and linen drawers open occasionally, and use an electric fan to circulate the air. Never let damp or wet clothing lie around or stagnate in hampers.
- 5** Avoid feather and down pillows, comforters, and cushions.
Replace feather and down cushions and pillows with latex foam, and down comforters with cotton or fuzz-free wool blankets.
- 6** Keep your bedroom free of dust.
Electronic air filters are more effective than mechanical filters, but they must be cleaned frequently. In humid areas, a dehumidifier is helpful, particularly if you are sensitive to molds. In dry climates, low humidity may aggravate hay fever, so a humidifier may help. To minimize household dust, encase pillows, mattresses, and box springs in washable dust-proof cases, cover upholstered furniture with non-allergenic materials, and keep drapes, venetian blinds, moldings and tops of picture frames free of dust. To avoid dust when doing housework, wear a face mask.
- 7** Avoid scented soaps and perfumes.
Buy unscented soaps, powders, and non-allergenic cosmetics.
- 8** Keep away from animals that cause allergy symptoms.

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RHÔNE-POULENC RORER PHARMACEUTICALS INC.
500 ARCOLLA ROAD
COLLEGEVILLE, PA 19426