

Spring 2006 Wellness Article

Spring into Action to Combat Seasonal Allergies

(ARA) - After the long, dark cold of winter, many people look to spring to bring them bright sunshine, warmer weather - and non-stop sneezing, runny nose, and itchy eyes. According to the American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology (AAAAI), seasonal allergic rhinitis, also known as "spring allergies" or "rose fever," is one of the most common allergic conditions in the United States, affecting approximately 36 million people (www.aaaai.org).

Julie Akason, BSN, RN, program chair of the Medical Assisting program at Argosy University/Twin Cities, explains why many of us suffer from spring allergies in the first place: "Inhaled allergens, like molds and pollen, trigger an inflammatory response in the nasal passages," says Akason. "Molds are common allergens in spring when the environment is thawing and damp. Tree pollen is also one of the most common early allergens in the springtime, when the trees are budding and the leaves are blooming."

Why do people have allergy attacks on an annual basis? Usually, people are exposed to the allergen once and their bodies become sensitized. When they are exposed subsequently, the immune system triggers a release of histamine that causes the runny nose, watery eyes, and scratchy throat symptoms. "Symptoms of seasonal allergies closely mimic the common cold, so if a person has a 'cold' every spring around the same time, he or she may want to be tested for allergies," explains Akason.



According to Tara Dailey, Practical Nursing chair at Brown Mackie College - Cincinnati, the best way to keep from suffering the symptoms is to simply avoid the allergens.

"For those allergic to mold or grass pollen, it is best to schedule outdoor activities later in the day after yards have been mown. Allergy sufferers should always be aware of the pollen count - many weather forecasters will announce local pollen count during newscasts. The higher the count, the more an allergy sufferer is encouraged to stay indoors," says Dailey.

Dailey also advises an allergy sufferer never to rub or touch the eyes if he or she is being affected by allergens. Also, do a thorough spring cleaning because, according to AAAAI, windows, book shelves and air conditioning vents collect dust and mold throughout the winter, and they can easily provoke allergy symptoms.

"Ultimately, allergy sufferers should always be prepared," says Dailey. "If you are traveling, make sure to take your medication with you, and use it as directed. Know your triggers and avoid them to the best of your ability."

(Courtesy of ARA Content)