

## **SEASONAL ALLERGIC RHINITIS**

Seasonal allergies, also known as allergic rhinitis, is caused by allergy to various pollens such as grasses, trees, ragweed and weeds. Symptoms often include sneezing, runny nose, itchy watery eyes, fatigue, and occasionally leads to shortness of breath, cough, and wheezing. Many people who suffer from allergies feel like they have a bad cold every day that just never goes away. In addition to all of these symptoms, fatigue can be a direct result of the allergic condition complicated by sleep disruption from ongoing nasal obstruction.

### **TREE POLLEN**

In northwest Indiana, tree pollen usually begins in early to mid March and continues until the beginning of June. In addition to all of the usual allergy symptoms listed above, tree pollen allergy is often associated with mild to severe eye allergy symptoms. Patients with tree pollen allergy often suffer from itchy watery eyes that can be severe enough to interfere with normal activities. Children will often develop nasal, eye, and skin allergy symptoms when playing on the grass in spring before grass pollen is out. These symptoms are usually due to tree pollen that falls on the lawn and is concentrated there.

### **GRASS POLLEN**

Grass pollen begins around the first of June just as tree pollen begins to fade. Patients with grass pollen allergy will often blame their symptoms on cottonwood as these trees begin to lose their cottony seeds at just about the same time as grass pollen comes out. Cottonwood begins to pollinate in March and April and there is no significant level of this tree's pollen left when it begins to drop its white puffy balls which contain seeds, not pollen. Grass pollen lasts throughout the summer and begins to fade in fall. While mowed lawns do not produce grass pollen, they are a repository for many other plant pollens and mold spores throughout spring, summer and fall.

## **WEED AND RAGWEED POLLEN**

Weed pollen begins in mid to late July and ragweed pollen, the common and most severe cause of fall allergy symptoms, begin the first week of August. People with severe ragweed pollen allergy, called hay fever, begin to experience all of the usual allergy symptoms suddenly and these symptoms often persist until November. Although allergy symptoms typically occur during certain times of the year as stated above, many people have allergies to one or more types of pollen and then symptoms seem to overlap into other times of the year. In addition, people with allergies to mold or house dust mites will often find their symptoms worse on warm, humid days adding to their usual seasonal symptoms. It is not only very important to be aware of the severity of your symptoms, but the exact times of year they begin or worsen.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL METHODS**

Environmental control methods are the cornerstone of therapy. It is critical that the house be closed up and the air conditioning remains running throughout these months. Air filtration systems, such as a HEPA filter, remove microscopic pollen from the air and are quite effective. Even on cool nights, the pollen count can be extremely high and the house must remain closed. HEPA filters are ineffective if the windows are left open. Bedroom doors should be closed at all times and pets should not be allowed in or around the bedroom. Even if you or your children are not allergic to pets, their fur can collect large quantities of pollen and cause significant allergy symptoms at night when they are in the bedroom. It is best not to have carpeting in the bedroom. Changing clothes and showering immediately after prolonged periods outdoors can be very helpful. Pollen counts can be found at [pollen.com](http://pollen.com), weather reports, and various phone apps.

## **MEDICATIONS**

Allergy medications work best when taken regularly. Inhaled nasal steroid sprays effectively treat all symptoms of nasal allergy. Prescription (topical steroid or antihistamine) nasal sprays are not “addicting” and are often used in conjunction with other medications. Short-term side effects include sneezing, nasal burning, and occasionally a bloody nose. Most of these side effects are from preservatives in the nose sprays. Changing to different brands can often help relieve these side effects. Newer non-sedating antihistamines block many allergy symptoms. Over-the-counter sedating antihistamines such as Benadryl should be avoided because of their side effects, which can cause difficulty with school, work, driving, and operating motorized equipment. *Allergy medications are best taken on a regular basis* and not “as needed”. Combinations of medications, such as steroid nasal sprays and antihistamines, work better than either medication alone. When medications seem to fail, it is often because one’s allergy symptoms are more severe and medication alone will no longer be able to maintain control. It is best to start medications just prior to the beginning of your allergy season and continue until the pollen counts drop significantly. Although pollen counts will drop on rainy days as the rain washes the pollen away (temporarily), the symptoms will all come back with dry, windy conditions.

## **ALLERGY TESTING AND IMMUNOTHERAPY**

Allergy testing is used to help define what causes you or your child’s allergy symptoms at different times of the year. However, allergy testing can not define the severity of one’s allergy symptoms, only a detailed medical history can do this. Allergy immunotherapy (allergy shots) is sometimes recommended to control allergy symptoms. Allergy immunotherapy can be very effective but takes several months to improve symptoms and must be continued for several years. Although allergy immunotherapy will not “cure” allergic rhinitis, it can significantly improve many symptoms, help prevent development of

asthma, markedly decrease the fatigue associated with other symptoms, and decrease medication use. The decision to begin allergy immunotherapy is very individual and depends on many factors. Allergy immunotherapy should be considered when other methods fail to adequately control symptoms. In particular, the fatigue associated with allergies is rarely controlled with medication. While allergy immunotherapy represents a very large commitment, the long term results are often very dramatic. For further information please visit our website or contact our office.