

### **Sorting Out Seasonal Allergies**

Sneezing, runny nose, nasal congestion. Symptoms of the common cold or seasonal allergies? Without the intervention of your physician, it might be hard to tell. Here's what you should know about seasonal allergies – what causes them and how you might avoid them this season.

“Allergies are an abnormal reaction by a person's immune system to a normally harmless substance,” explains our consulting D.O., an osteopathic physician. “People can be allergic to all types of things, including pollens from trees, grasses and weeds, mold spores, pet dander, dust mites, foods and medications.”

According to doctors, the term “seasonal allergies” refers only to allergic reactions triggered during certain times of the year, such as spring or fall. They are typically allergic reactions to tree, weed, grass, and ragweed pollen.

“As the weather gets warmer and plants start to bloom, trees and grasses release pollen into the air,” says our consulting doctor. “For people with seasonal allergies, this pollen reacts with antibodies in the body, causing histamine and other chemical substances to be released, which then cause various symptoms.”

Symptoms of seasonal allergies can include:

- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Nasal congestion
- Itching of the nose and
- Post-nasal drip
- Itchy, puffy, red, and watery eyes

“Not everyone will experience all the symptoms of seasonal allergies.” says the doctor.

### **How do I know if I have seasonal allergies?**

According to doctors, the best way to determine whether or not your symptoms are caused by seasonal allergies is to visit your primary care physician.

“Your physician may see different signs during a physical exam that point to allergies, such as the appearance of your nasal mucous membranes,” she explains.

The only true way to determine if a person has allergies, according to physicians, is to undergo allergy testing.

“Your physician may recommend that you visit an allergist to identify exactly which allergies you have.”

### **How can I avoid seasonal allergies this season?**

Because seasonal allergies are caused by pollen that exists in the air, it can be difficult to avoid, but not impossible. Here are physician’s six tips for avoiding pollen exposure.

1. Keep doors and windows closed, both in your home and when traveling. Use air conditioning.
2. Do not mow the lawn or go near freshly cut grass.
3. Limit morning outdoor activity, when pollen is usually emitted -- between 5-10 a.m.
4. Take a vacation during the height of the pollen season to a more pollen-free area, such as the beach.
5. Do not hang your laundry outside to dry, where it can collect pollen.
6. Remove clothing and shower if you have spent a lot of time outdoors.

### **How do I treat my seasonal allergies?**

“Some of the most common treatments for seasonal allergies are over-the-counter antihistamines and decongestants,” says our doctor. “Your physician may also prescribe steroid nasal sprays, which work to decrease inflammation.”

If environmental/avoidance precautions and medications fail to provide relief, allergy shots are usually administered and very effective.

**Am I stuck with seasonal allergies forever?**

Some allergy sufferers become so accustomed to their symptoms that living with them becomes a way of life, and they accept the inconveniences of seasonal sniffing and sneezing. Usually after treatment, they will realize the improvements in their quality of life and productivity.

“Your physician can best determine a method of treatment that will suit your lifestyle,” says the doctor. “The thing people need to realize is that they do have options when it comes to dealing with allergies.”

Preventive medicine is just one aspect of care osteopathic physicians provide. DOs are fully licensed to prescribe medicine and practice in all specialty areas, including surgery. DOs are trained to consider the health of the whole person and use their hands to help diagnose and treat their patients.