

RESPIRATORY ALLERGIES & YOU



Respiratory allergies can have a serious impact on your life. This booklet will help you understand the basics about respiratory allergies and the management options available.

For more information visit www.facingallergies.com or speak to your healthcare professional.

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STALLERGENES  GREER
Life beyond allergy

WHAT ARE RESPIRATORY ALLERGIES?

- Allergy describes a condition where your **immune system** 'over-reacts' to a normally harmless substance in your environment (an "allergen"), such as pollen, animal dander or house dust mites.¹
- **Respiratory allergies** include allergic rhinitis and allergic asthma.²
 - Allergic rhinitis** is a common and distressing inflammatory condition affecting the upper airways and the membranes of the nose and eyes, caused by a reaction to an allergen. Allergic rhinitis is often accompanied with conjunctivitis and/or associated with asthma.²
 - Allergic asthma** is caused by exposure of the bronchial mucosa to an inhaled aero-allergen. Asthma is a commonly occurring and potentially life-threatening illness where the respiratory airways become inflamed and swollen.²

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF RESPIRATORY ALLERGIES¹



- Congested
- Itchy
- Sneezing
- Sinus pressure
- Runny



- Red
- Itchy
- Watery



- Shortness of breath
- Coughing
- Irritated airways
- Tight chest
- Wheezing

WHAT IS CAUSING MY RESPIRATORY ALLERGIES?

- Aero-allergens that cause respiratory allergies may be present only **seasonally** (during certain times of the year) or **perennially** (year-round).³ Some common allergens are listed below. Many people are sensitized or allergic to more than one allergen.

SEASONAL ALLERGENS³

- Grass pollen
- Tree pollen (birch, olive...)
- Weed pollen



PERENNIAL ALLERGENS³

- House dust mites
- Animal dander
- Mold



Less than half of the patients suffering from allergic rhinitis consult a physician⁴ and allergy sufferers are rarely offered allergen diagnosis or advice.¹

WHY SHOULD I DO SOMETHING ABOUT MY RESPIRATORY ALLERGIES?



- Respiratory allergies are a **chronic** condition.⁵
- Allergies and their symptoms often appear in a **particular sequence** during their childhood, and this progression of the symptoms and allergic disease is known as the 'allergic march'.¹
- Respiratory allergies may also **interfere** with your everyday life, causing sleep loss, absenteeism from school or work, difficulty concentrating, and irritability.^{1,2,6,7,8}

DAILY LIFE^{1,2,7,8,18}

- Avoiding activities (outdoor and indoor)
- Disturbed sleep
- Loss of self-esteem
- Tiredness
- Irritability

PROFESSIONAL LIFE^{1,2,7,8}

- Sick days
- Reduced productivity
- Difficulty concentrating

SCHOOL LIFE^{1,2,6,7,8}

- Missed class time
- Learning impairments
- Lower grades
- Difficulty concentrating

DID YOU KNOW...?

59%
of allergy sufferers report that nasal congestion impacts job performance⁸

More than **1 in 2** people with respiratory allergies will never consult a doctor⁴

Work productivity drops by **20%** on bad allergy days¹⁸

Allergic rhinitis affects over **500 million** people worldwide⁷



WHEN SHOULD I SEE MY DOCTOR OR AN ALLERGY SPECIALIST?

■ If you think you or your child is experiencing respiratory allergies, you should consult with your doctor as soon as possible. It is important to be properly diagnosed in order to receive adequate medical care. If left untreated, allergic rhinitis symptoms themselves can worsen, leading to a spiral of worsening co-existing conditions.⁹

WHAT CAN I EXPECT WHEN I SEE MY DOCTOR?

- If your doctor determines that you (or your child) is suffering from respiratory allergies, they will likely advise you on allergen avoidance techniques, whenever possible (see tips on avoiding allergens on the next page!).⁷
- Your doctor may also prescribe you symptomatic medications, to alleviate your symptoms.⁷
- Your doctor may also prescribe additional tests, or refer you to an allergy specialist, to identify the allergen triggering your symptoms.
- Keep a symptoms diary and take it to your medical visits!

Before seeing your doctor, consider keeping a diary of when your symptoms occur.

Remember to note:

- The day and time of day when your symptoms worsen
- When your symptoms tend to improve
- What you are experiencing (nose, eye, breathing difficulties)
- Possible sources that are triggering your symptoms
- What medications you are taking, when, and if they help
- Any questions you may have!

HOW DOES MY DOCTOR DIAGNOSE RESPIRATORY ALLERGIES?

- The diagnosis of respiratory allergies is based on clinical history, physical examination, allergy tests and specific questions.^{1,2}
- Identifying the causal allergen can be an important step in taking control of your allergy, allowing you to reduce exposure to those substances that trigger your symptoms.¹
- One of the diagnostic methods to identify the triggering allergen may be skin prick tests. Skin prick test results should be interpreted by your doctor based on clinical symptoms, medical history, and, where necessary, other test results in order to assess possible allergy to a specific allergen.^{1,11}

Identifying the causal allergen can be an important step in taking control of your allergy.¹

HOW ARE RESPIRATORY ALLERGIES MANAGED?

- **Allergen avoidance** is an essential step in managing allergies.¹
- **Symptomatic drugs**, are effective and may reduce the severity of your allergy symptoms, though these medications have no long-lasting effect when stopped.^{1,7}
- **Allergy immunotherapy (AIT)** is considered to be the only potentially causal therapy for allergic diseases and consists of administering gradually increasing doses of the triggering allergen(s) until the immune system, over time, builds tolerance to that allergen. Allergy immunotherapy can improve allergy symptoms, reduce the use of symptomatic medications and may provide long-lasting persistent effects on your allergy symptoms.^{1,7,13,14,15}

AVOID your triggering allergen ^{1,3,7,16,17}

- Once the triggering allergens are correctly identified, avoiding or minimising your exposure to these, may help reduce your symptoms, whenever this is possible.
- Unfortunately, the majority of single preventive measures of indoor allergen control fail to achieve improvement of asthma and rhinitis.
- Below are some helpful tips that you may find useful to minimize your contact with certain allergens.

FOR ANY ALLERGEN

- Eliminate carpets and rugs in favour of hard flooring
- Choose closed pieces of furniture, such as drawers instead of shelves
- At least once a week, vacuum using a high efficiency particulate air grade filter (HEPA)

INDOOR ALLERGENS (house dust mites, cat dander...)

- Wash bedding at least once a week (above 60°C)
- Cover pillows, mattresses and quilts with house dust mite resistant casings and wash these every 2 months.
- Reduce indoor humidity (do not dry clothes on the heater)
- Do not allow pet into the bedrooms
- Groom animals regularly outside

OUTDOOR ALLERGENS (pollen)

- Stay informed of your local pollen-count to know when to avoid going outdoors.
- Avoid activities known to cause exposure to pollen (mowing grass, camping)
- Change and wash clothing after being outdoors
- Shower soon after activities where there is high exposure to pollen
- Keep car window closed and consider installing pollen filters in your car



RELIEVE

with symptomatic medications

- Symptomatic drugs are effective and may reduce the severity of your allergy symptoms, though these medications have no long-lasting effect when stopped.^{1,7}
- There are numerous options available, both directly from a pharmacy without a prescription or by prescription from your doctor, and come in a range of dosage-forms:^{7,12}

NASAL SPRAYS



EYE DROPS



ORAL MEDICATIONS



INHALERS



- The various medications work in different ways to target your different allergy symptoms. For example:
 - **Antihistamines** work by blocking the action of histamine, a chemical released by your immune system during an allergic reaction that causes swelling and itching. Available as oral medications, nasal sprays, eye drops.¹
 - **Decongestants** are used to help ease a blocked or stuffy nose (nasal congestion). They may be helpful for congestion caused by various conditions, including allergic rhinitis. Available as nose drops or nasal sprays and oral medication. Decongestant nose drops or nasal sprays should not be used for more than seven days at a time.³
 - **Corticosteroids** help to reduce inflammation; for patients suffering from allergic rhinitis and asthma. Available as nasal sprays, drops, oral medication and inhalers. Usually only available with a prescription and must be carefully monitored by your doctor.^{1,3,12}
- Symptomatic medications can help many allergy sufferers with short-term relief of allergy symptoms.¹⁹

Symptomatic medications offer temporary relief, but they do not act on the cause of your allergic condition.^{1,7,10,19}

TREAT

with allergy immunotherapy



- Allergy immunotherapy is considered to be the **only potentially causal therapy that can alter the course of the disease.**^{10,13}
- The treatment consists of administering gradually increasing doses of the triggering allergen(s) until the immune system, over time, **builds tolerance** to that allergen.¹
- AIT is effective in **reducing symptoms** of allergic asthma and rhinitis and potentially modifies the underlying course of disease.¹⁴

Allergy immunotherapy can be administered in 2 different ways:^{1,10}

- 1. Subcutaneous immunotherapy (injections),** under the skin, performed in your doctor's office.
- 2. Sublingual immunotherapy (drops or tablets),** placed under the tongue. The first dose is taken in your doctor's office and subsequent doses are self-administered at home.

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YOUR RESPIRATORY ALLERGIES CAN AND *SHOULD* BE EFFECTIVELY TREATED!

- Respiratory allergies are chronic.⁵
- Respiratory allergies can have severe impact on daily life:²
 - Your productivity at work or school
 - Your sleep

Remember that solutions exist!

If you believe that you suffer from respiratory allergies, remember that **solutions exist**. Speak to your family doctor for medical advice and to ask about referral to an allergy specialist, if required.

For more information, visit FacingAllergies.com and discover the **I-START program!**



I-START (Integrated Solutions for Targeted Allergy Treatment) is:

- **A new and innovative program**
- **Aims to improve access to information about appropriate medical care for people living with respiratory allergies**
- **A gateway to help you better understand and manage your disease**

Developed in partnership
with GAAPP



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