

# WHAT IS ALLERGIC RHINITIS?

Rhinitis is inflammation (redness and swelling) of the lining of the nose. In allergic rhinitis, the inflammation is caused by oversensitivity to foreign substances known as allergens.

Usually allergens are harmless substances, but they cause reactions in sensitive persons. Common outdoor allergens include trees, grass, weed pollen, ragweed, sage or goldenrod pollen, mold spores, and industrial pollution. Common indoor allergens include house dust, mold, feathers, wool, cosmetics, dander of furry pets, tobacco smoke, aerosols, and strong odors (ie. ammonia, chlorine, and fresh paint).

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?



## HOW DOES IT OCCUR?

In sensitive people, the cells in the lining of the nose react to certain allergens. These cells release a chemical called histamine that causes swelling, mucus production, itching, and sneezing.

## HOW LONG DO THE EFFECTS LAST?

The symptoms of allergic rhinitis last as long as you are exposed to the allergen (or allergens) that causes your

*In seasonal allergic rhinitis, usually caused by outdoor allergens, symptoms include:*

- itchy eyes
- watery nasal discharge
- nasal
- stuffiness
- sneezing
- wheezing
- swollen nasal membranes.

*In nonseasonal allergic rhinitis, usually caused by indoor allergens, symptoms include:*

- red, itchy, watery eyes
- watery nasal discharge
- spasmodic sneezing
- chronic nasal congestion with or without mucus.

## HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

Most cases of allergic rhinitis are diagnosed by the symptoms and the appearance of the lining of the nose.

Sometimes secretions from the nose are looked at under the microscope to make the diagnosis.

To pinpoint the allergen causing your reaction, a doctor may give you a series of sensitivity tests, including skin tests, especially if you don't respond to treatment.

## HOW CAN I TAKE CARE OF **MYSELF?**



### If you suspect food as the allergen, you can:

- Avoid foods you suspect of causing allergic reactions.
- Follow an elimination diet. This means you withdraw food you suspect caused your allergy, wait for your symptoms to disappear, and then reintroduce it. If the symptoms again appear, you can confirm that you are indeed allergic to that food.
- Make an appointment with one of our allergists to be tested.

### Take steps to control your environment

- Close the windows and use an air conditioner.
- Wear a face mask if you mow your grass or do factory work that produces dust.
- Change furnace filters frequently.
- Use disposable bags in your vacuum cleaner.
- Vent your clothes dryer to the outside of the house.
- Use a humidifier (cautiously) if the air in your home is too dry or a dehumidifier if the air is too humid.

- Put a vapor barrier in crawl spaces.
- Install adequate insulation to eliminate condensation.
- Increase ventilation
- Vacuum rather than sweep.
- Control mold in the basement and crawl spaces.
- Dust your house daily with a damp cloth.
- Clean your house thoroughly.
- Keep furry pets outdoors.
- Forbid smoking in your house.
- Use hypoallergenic and unscented cosmetics.

### In your bedroom, you can:

- Remove the rugs.
- Clean the curtains monthly.
- Use plastic or rubberized encasings for your mattresses and box springs.
- Remove upholstered furniture.
- Use synthetic pillows and nonlint bedspreads.
- Avoid sleeping with washable stuffed toys.
- Keep your closet door closed.
- Keep your closet uncluttered.

## HOW IS IT **TREATED?**

Treatment may include:

- the best possible control of the environment
- oral or inhaled medication, or both, including antihistamines and possible short-term use of corticosteroids (cortisone-like medicine) in severe cases
- immunotherapy or hyposensitization (ineffective for certain allergies)

## HOW CAN I HELP PREVENT ALLERGIC RHINITIS?

Be aware of previous allergic reactions in yourself and other family members. Try to identify specific allergens then avoid contact with them.

If you have seasonal allergic rhinitis ask your doctor to suggest medicine you can start using before your symptoms start to cause problems.