

If you hear “God Bless You” more than “Hello” this spring, you may want to read this

By Dr. Karen Prentice D.O. F.A.A.P.

Blue skies, sunshine, and the smell of freshly mown grass and flowers tell us that spring is here at last. We turn our thoughts to picnics, bike rides, and simply enjoying the great outdoors. But for many of us, spring can be a time of sneezing, coughing, runny nose, itchy eyes and feeling miserable. According to the American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology, “allergies are the 6th leading cause of chronic disease.” Allergies can affect our sleep, concentration, energy level, and overall wellness.

Allergic rhinitis or “hay fever” occurs when things in our environment such as pollens, mold, and dog hair create an inflammatory reaction causing a histamine response and the allergy symptoms mentioned above. Before you start treatment, it’s best not to self-diagnose. Many things can mimic allergy symptoms such as nasal polyps, sinus infections, and gastroesophageal reflux or “heartburn,” so please go see your doctor.

Once you have been given the diagnosis of allergies, my preference is to avoid medications if possible and practice the following preventative measures:

1. Make home your “safe haven” and leave pollens outside. Take shoes off at the door to avoid tracking in pollens.
2. Keep windows and doors closed.
3. Declutter. Reduce things sitting out that can accumulate dust and pollens.
4. If possible get rid of carpet and upholstered furniture.
5. Use a dust proof plastic mattress cover on your bed and avoid feather pillows and down comforters.
6. Wash sheets and bedding weekly in hot water.
7. Keep pets out of your bedroom. Pets carry pollen on their coats and feet.
8. Use HEPA filters and change your central duct work filters often.
9. Take a shower after being outside and in the evening to remove pollens attached to your hair and body.
10. Manage your stress. Stress can cause inflammation, worsening allergies.
11. Choose an anti-inflammatory diet. My favorite is Dr. Andrew Weil’s Anti-Inflammatory Diet and Food Pyramid. By eating foods that reduce inflammation such as salmon, dark green vegetables, berries, and probiotic-rich foods like tempeh, kimchi, and sauerkraut, you can improve your allergies.
12. Consider a trial off of milk and dairy foods. For many, the protein in milk and dairy can irritate the immune system causing inflammation and making allergies worse.

If your preventative measures are not working here is a list of supplements, treatments, and medications which may help. As always, consult your doctor before starting any new treatment.

1. Nasal washes/Neti pot. To avoid the risk of a fatal parasitic brain infection never, ever use tap water for your nasal washes. Always use bottled water or normal saline.

2. Probiotics. Promising studies are showing that improving your intestinal health improves inflammation and allergies. For adults, take 50 billion CFU or colony forming units per day.
3. Vitamin D3. This vitamin reduces inflammation improving many aspects of our health including allergies. Usual adult dose is 2000 IU or international units per day.
4. Multivitamin with zinc.
5. Acupuncture. This age old treatment has been shown to reduce inflammation that can cause allergic symptoms. Look for a certified acupuncturist or someone specifically trained in Traditional Chinese Medicine. Ask your doctor for recommendations.
6. Essential oils. Emerging studies are showing many health benefits to diffusing essential oils or using them topically. Lavender, eucalyptus, lemon, and peppermint oils all reduce inflammation and help with allergy symptoms. Never ingest essential oils, always dilute in a carrier oil like coconut or olive oil when using them topically, and please ask a provider trained in the use of essential oils for appropriate use.
7. Promising Plant-Based Medications. Please notice that I call the following “medications.” Even though they are plant-based, as with any treatment there are potential side effects and interactions. Unfortunately, the FDA does not oversee the quality or content of these products. Check Consumer Labs which is an independent organization that tests brands for content and quality and check with your doctor before taking any new treatment. Ask your doctor about D-Hist, D-Hist Jr, and quercetin.
8. Traditional medications. My favorite traditional treatments are the non-sedating antihistamines such as loratadine, fexofenadine, and cetirizine. I would avoid diphenhydramine or Benadryl for daily use as this is sedating. Nasacort, Flonase, or Rhinocort are good nasal sprays. Avoid nasal decongestant sprays as these can be addictive and if stopped can cause worsening nasal symptoms. Avoid oral decongestants as these can cause insomnia, jitteriness, and increase in heart rate. As always, ask your doctor or provider what they think is the right choice for you or your child.

I leave you with one final thought. Thomas Edison said, “The doctor of the future will no longer treat the human frame with drugs, but rather will cure and prevent disease with nutrition.” I truly believe this and highly recommend before reaching for medication you try to take the toxins and chemicals out of your diet and increase anti-inflammatory foods and supplements. Good luck and God Bless You (just in case you sneezed!)

Dr. Prentice