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ALLERGIES/HAY FEVER (ALLERGIC RHINITIS)

Definitions and symptoms:

1. A clear nasal discharge with sneezing, sniffing and nasal itching sometimes associated with headache and fatigue and occurring during pollen season or to the same month each year.
2. Inflammation of the membranes of the nose and eyes caused by sensitivity to pollen, dust mites, animal dander or molds.
3. Seasonal outdoor allergens include tree pollens (spring), spring grasses (late spring/summer), weeds (summer and fall), and molds (fall and early spring).
4. Eye, sinus or ear congestion is commonly associated. These particular symptoms can lead to an increase number of eye, sinus or ear infections requiring antibiotics.
5. This is a common (15% of population) chronic condition that will probably recur each year.

Treatment:

1. The best treatment is to avoid the allergens as much as possible.
2. The best drug for hay fever is an antihistamine medicine. There are many types of antihistamine medicines available like Dimetapp, Benadryl or Claritin. Symptoms clear up faster if you start this medicine at the first signs of sneezing and sniffing. For children with occasional symptoms, antihistamines can be taken when symptoms are present. For children with daily symptoms, the best control is to take them continuously every day during pollen season. One important reason to treat your child's early symptoms is to avoid the secondary bacterial infections that can develop in the eyes, sinus, or ears that commonly require antibiotics to treat.
3. The main side effect is drowsiness. The newest, long acting, non-sedating medicines like Claritin or Zyrtec and other prescription medicine like Allegra are best for this.
4. Antihistamines do not decrease nasal congestion. This is best treated with a decongestant like pseudoephedrine on children 4yrs and older, these can be taken by mouth in liquid, capsule or tablet form. Decongestant sprays available over the counter should not be used for more than three days due to severe side effects from prolonged use.
5. The third kind of medicine is anti-inflammatory nose spray, obtained by prescription from your doctor. These are used once to twice a day and are best when given on a regular basis rather than as needed.
6. Eye allergies are sometimes associated with hay fever. If your child has itchy watery eyes, wash the face and eyelids to remove pollen. Then apply a cool compress. Install 2 drops of long-acting vasoconstrictor eye drops, or allergy eye drops available over the counter.
7. Environmental controls in the home designed to minimized exposure to dust mites, animal dander and molds are best. Dust mites live in bedding, rugs, furniture and drapes. They feed on skin cells, fabric fibers, food crumbs and humidity. Make every effort to make your home and child's bedroom less hospitable to these creatures.

Environmental controls

- Cover the mattress and box-springs with an air-tight vinyl or a nylon case that zips.
 - Keep floors free of carpet. Use a damp mop or vacuum often.
 - Remove drapes and upholstered furniture, substitute washable curtains and furniture you can wipe clean.
 - Wash sheets, blankets, curtains small rugs and stuffed animals frequently using hot (130F) water. Cold or warm water does not kill dust mites.
 - Use a synthetic pillow or comforter, with hypoallergenic material not down or feathers. Avoid wool blankets too.
 - Keep the humidity below 50% with a dehumidifier or air-conditioner. This will also help with mold if you wash with chlorine bleach. Keep bathrooms, cellars and other damp areas well ventilated.
 - It is best not to have a pet with fur or feathers. If you already have a dog or cat that is too much a part of the family, then keep them out of the child's bedroom, bathe it often and keep it brushed to reduce shedding. If the bedroom has no carpeting, then a high efficiency particulate-arresting (HEPA) filter can help with decreasing animal allergens enough to tolerate in some children.
8. Outside the home, avoiding pollen is hard to do because it is found everywhere. Pollen counts are highest in the early morning between 5-10am. Keeping the windows closed at night and washing the child's hair before bedtime, and drying linens indoors may help to minimize the pollen exposure. Avoid going outside when someone is cutting grass and avoid pets that have been outside and covered with pollen. Avoid tobacco smoke
9. Finally, if all these measures are still failing to control the allergies the doctor may refer you to an allergist for skin testing and a series of desensitizing injections. These work well for pollens, dust mites or animal dander but less effective against molds and not effective for food allergies. The injections may take several months or years even. Some children need minimal amounts of medicine while others require all the therapies listed. With the correct approach, almost all children will find relief from allergy symptoms and live a normal life.