

MYRTLE AVENUE Pediatrics



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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 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. There are many types of antihistamines available like Dimetapp, Benadryl and Claritin. Symptoms clear up faster if the medicine is started 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, sinuses, or ears that commonly require antibiotics to treat.
3. The main side effect of allergy medication is drowsiness. The newer antihistamines such as Zyrtec, Claritin and Allegra offer substantial benefit with less sedation.
4. These medicines do not decrease nasal congestion. Decongestants like pseudoephedrine and phenylephrine are available for use in children over 6 years of age for this purpose. Although over the counter, pseudoephedrine must be bought directly from the pharmacist. Also available are the decongestant nose sprays. Although effective, the use must be limited to 3 days to avoid a rebound over congestion after 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 minimize 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 that you 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 carpeting, then a high efficiency particulate-arresting (HEPA) filter can help with decreasing animal allergens.
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, 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 of these measures are still failing to control the allergies the doctors may refer you to an allergist for skin testing and a series of desensitizing treatments. These work well for pollens, dust mites or animal dander but are less effective against molds and not effective for food allergies. The treatments may take several months or even years. Some children need minimal amounts of medicine while others require all the therapies. With the correct approach, almost all children will find relief from allergy symptoms and live a normal life.