

Controlling Allergies and Asthma

Enjoy the Outdoors!

By Charlene Pierce

Spring is here! The birds are singing; the grass is greening; the flowers are blooming.

If you have allergies, your eyes are itching, your nose is running, and your head is pounding.

Don't run back inside just yet! There is hope for you to enjoy the outdoors again.

More than 100 million people suffer from allergies, and 25 million people in the United States have asthma. Those are big numbers, which is why new treatments and medicines are continuously being developed. Knowing what triggers your allergies and asthma is a vital step toward controlling them.

Drinking plenty of water and eating fruits and vegetables daily is good for allergies and your whole body. Specifically, studies have shown a link between fewer allergy symptoms and eating grapes, apples, oranges, and tomatoes. Controlling your symptoms is often directly related to controlling your environment. Leaving your shoes at the door and changing your clothes when you come home will keep the allergens you picked up outdoors from spreading through your home.

Using a nasal rinse (also known as a neti pot) can be a little messy, but its effectiveness can't be denied. A nasal rinse uses water to physically wash away allergens before they take hold in your nose. As an added bonus, it can also rinse away germs that cause colds and flu.

The same substances can trigger allergies and asthma, but allergies aren't the only trigger for asthma. It can also be triggered by cold air, exercise, or stress. Asthma is a serious, long-term condition. It can be controlled with medication but cannot be cured.

Antihistamines are commonly used to relieve allergy symptoms. Corticosteroid nasal sprays are an effective treatment for nasal congestion. Some people turn to acupuncture to control seasonal allergy symptoms. This works by helping regulate your immune system's response to allergens.

Immunotherapy can reduce the severity of allergy symptoms and is currently the only long-term solution for improving allergies. It works by slowly introducing the allergens to your system so your body can get used to their presence. Patients will start to see results in three to four months, but it will take three to five years for the body to develop permanent immunity. For many, it is well worth the wait. In the past, patients had to go into the doctor's office for weekly or bi-weekly shots. Now, doctors can prescribe sublingual drops to take at home.

The newest medication for asthma, Airsupra (formerly known as PT027), combines albuterol (a beta2-agonist) with

budesonide (an anti-inflammatory corticosteroid). It reduces the risk of severe symptoms by 27 percent. Those who do not get full relief from their symptoms with an inhaler can undergo biologic therapy to help them breathe better. The therapy ranges from an IV treatment every few months to injections every few weeks.

Asthma symptoms often show up in infants and toddlers, but the diagnosis is only accurate after children are five. This is because a third of children will cough and wheeze when they have a cold, but most of them don't have asthma.

Testing for allergies in children involves skin and blood tests and can be done any time after they reach six months of age. Allergies can be minor, causing nothing more than nasal congestion, or, as in the case of peanut allergies, they can be

fatal. An estimated 2 percent of children have a peanut allergy and 14 percent have seasonal allergies.

The American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI) recommends that women feel free to eat dairy, soy, and nuts while pregnant. There is no correlation between eating these foods during pregnancy and the child developing an allergy to them. Breastfeeding strengthens a baby's immune system and

is the most nutritious option for infants. Breast milk (even donated breastmilk) is unlikely to trigger an allergic reaction. Hydrolyzed infant formula is a hypoallergenic solution to soy or cow's milk if breast milk is unavailable.

Parents should start introducing foods to infants between four and six months of age, depending on the child's readiness. (Delaying introduction increases the risk of developing allergies.) Introduce one food at a time and only at home when parents can supervise the child. Introduce new foods every three to five days. Start with foods that are easy to digest, such as pears, bananas, and carrots. Introduce potential allergens like dairy, eggs, nuts, and fish the same way—one at a time and only at home. If your child is at high risk for allergies, introduce riskier foods under a doctor's supervision.

Don't hide indoors this spring! Talk to your doctor and take control of your allergies and asthma so you, too, can stop and smell the roses. **WE**

Sources for this article included: mayoclinic.org, aafa.org, and aaaai.org.

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