

MANAGING YOUR ALLERGIC RHINITIS

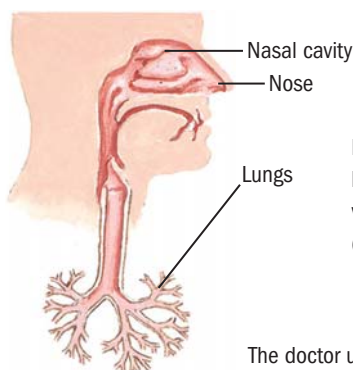


Allergies tend to run in families and affect nearly 25% of Americans. Allergic rhinitis can occur seasonally or year-round.

Symptoms include sneezing, itchy eyes, scratchy throat, and runny, stuffed, and itchy nose.



Smoke and smog may cause more problems in people with allergies. Other irritants include mold, pollen, house dust mites, and dust.



People with allergic rhinitis have nasal cavities that are very sensitive to substances (allergens) in the environment.

The doctor usually bases the diagnosis on symptoms alone, but may do skin testing to find out which allergens you are sensitive to.



What Is Allergic Rhinitis?

Allergic rhinitis consists of symptoms that occur after exposure to certain substances. This reaction is called an allergy. Allergies can be seasonal (hay fever), especially in spring and fall for a sensitivity to tree and grass pollens. Allergies can also occur year-round (e.g., to pets or house dust mites). Having allergies tends to run in families. Allergies usually occur in people younger than 20 but can develop at any age.

Allergic rhinitis is not contagious and can be controlled.

What Causes Allergic Rhinitis?

Irritants include smoke, smog, pollens, molds, and dust.

What Are the Symptoms of Allergic Rhinitis?

The most common symptoms include sneezing, itchy eyes, scratchy throat, and runny, stuffed, and itchy nose. Other symptoms are headaches and pressure in the front of the face, and difficulty sleeping.

Long-term problems associated with allergic rhinitis are nasal polyps (growths in the nose) and loss of the sense of smell.

How Is Allergic Rhinitis Diagnosed?

The doctor usually uses symptoms alone for diagnosis. The doctor may do skin tests to see which substances cause the symptoms. In people with chronic cough, a lung function test may help rule out asthma.

How Is Allergic Rhinitis Treated?

The best treatment usually involves reducing or avoiding exposure to substances causing symptoms (allergens), along with using antihistamines, and nasal decongestants. Preventing symptoms with drugs and using a mask in areas of high exposure to allergens may also help. People who respond poorly to drugs may get shots (injections, called desensitization). These injections of an allergen are given in increasing doses to get the body to block the allergic reaction. Possible drug side effects include sleepiness (oral antihistamines), palpitations or changes in blood pressure (oral decongestants), and thinning of tissues in the nose (intra-nasal steroids).

Treatment by an allergist (a doctor trained in treating allergies) or an ear, nose, and throat specialist may be needed in severe or resistant cases.

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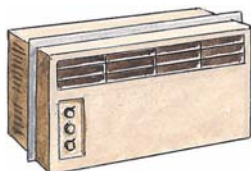
The best way to prevent allergic rhinitis is to avoid things you're allergic to.

Sometimes your doctor will prescribe medicines, such as antihistamines or corticosteroids, or will recommend allergy shots.



Nasal decongestants can have reverse effects when taken too often. Talk to your doctor about guidelines to follow.

Keep doors and windows closed and use air conditioning or central air with hypoallergenic filters if you have seasonal allergies.



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NOTES

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Allergic Rhinitis:

- ✓ **DO** avoid exposure to allergens. Close doors and windows, use air conditioning, and use special filters.
- ✓ **DO** avoid garden work (or wear a mask) if you are allergic to outdoor molds. Inside the house, use a dehumidifier.
- ✓ **DO** replace carpets and drapes with flooring and roller blinds, enclose mattresses and pillows in plastic bags, add a HEPA filter to the vacuum cleaner, and wash bedding at high temperatures if you are allergic to dust mites.
- ✓ **DO** keep the pet outdoors, if possible, if allergic to a pet. Have another household member wash and brush the animal weekly.
- ✓ **DO** take your medicine as recommended.
- ✓ **DO** contact your doctor if symptoms become constant and keep you awake, if nasal discharge becomes thick and colored, or you have problems with medicines.
- ✓ **DO** work with your doctor to identify triggers of symptoms. Your doctor may refer you to an allergist for allergy shots, or to an ear, nose, and throat specialist for advice on long-term management.
- ⊗ **DON'T** overuse nasal decongestants. These can have a rebound effect that produces the same symptoms as the allergy.
- ⊗ **DON'T** expose yourself to cigarette smoke or irritating substances.
- ⊗ **DON'T** forget to review your drugs and options with your doctor and pharmacist, especially if you take other medicines.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology
Tel: (800) 822-2762, (414) 272-6071
E-mail: info@aaaai.org
Website: <http://www.aaaai.org>
- Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
Tel: (800) 7-ASTHMA (727-8462)
Website: <http://www.aafa.org>
- American Lung Association
Tel: (800) LUNG-USA (586-4872), (212) 315-8700
Website: <http://www.lungusa.org>