

Seasonal allergies



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Neenah Joint School District Health & Wellness Center

Mon. 7 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Tues. 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Wed. 7 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Thurs. 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Fri. 7 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Allergy season is in full swing, and if you are a sufferer, you are likely experiencing symptoms. Allergy symptoms may include itchy or watery eyes, itchy ears, sensation of fluid in your ears, runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, sore throat from drainage, and a mild cough (also related to drainage). Some allergy sufferers will feel fatigued, particularly if allergy symptoms affect sleep or if certain allergy medications are used.

The most basic measure of allergy control is avoidance of known triggers. For instance, if you know that grass is a particular trigger for you, having someone else mow your lawn can help. If this is not possible, you can consider wearing a mask and goggles when mowing your lawn, and washing your hands and face as soon as you finish the chore. When trigger avoidance is not possible, washing your face and hands after known exposure will decrease the amount of time that allergens will contact the skin and mucosal surfaces, hopefully decreasing allergic response. When washing your face, you should gently scrub along your closed eyelash line prior to rinsing your face. (Your eyelashes are a great place for allergens to hitch a ride, and your eyes don't have great defense against allergens.) Neti pot and sinus rinses perform the same function of mechanically washing away allergens, and are used to flush the nasal cavity and sinuses. They can take some practice, but can be quite effective if used diligently during your allergy season.

There are a variety of over-the-counter medications used for allergies. The most basic is a nasal steroid spray. These are sold under the brand names Flonase or Nasonex, each with a generic equivalent. They are squirted into the nose daily, and work locally to decrease your body's allergic response to allergic triggers. They must be used diligently for at least one week in order to be effective. Oral antihistamines are another over-the-counter option. These are sold under the brand names Zyrtec, Claritin, and Allegra, each of which has a generic equivalent. These can also be used daily, but do not need to be used for an extended period of time in the way that sprays do. Benadryl is an older antihistamine that is effective, but usually causes drowsiness.

An example of an allergy control regimen would be as follows: avoid prolonged periods of time outdoors when a known allergen is blooming, wash face (scrubbing along closed eyelash line) after time outdoors during your allergy season, use Flonase or Nasonex daily during your allergy season, and take an oral antihistamine on the days when your symptoms are more bothersome.

If allergies are not well controlled with the above measures, consider being seen by a healthcare professional. Further, if your allergies induce asthma symptoms or your breathing is affected, you should seek medical care. Allergic induced asthma can be treated with inhalers and other medications, which can improve functional status. Patients who are not responsive to measures available through a primary care provider may benefit from seeing an allergist who can offer other specialized treatment options.