Talking To Your Doctor About
Seasonal Allergies
How to Talk to Your Doctor About Seasonal Allergies

Preparing for your Doctor’s Appointment

Seasonal allergies – also called hay fever or allergic rhinitis – can make you miserable. Symptoms like a runny nose, sneezing, and red, itchy eyes can last for weeks or months. And although we most often think of spring as allergy season, seasonal allergies may strike you in summer or fall as well, when different pollens are in the air. It depends on what you are allergic to, and many patients have more than one pollen allergy.

There is no cure for allergies. But there are powerful medicines and other proven treatments that help most seasonal allergy sufferers find relief from their symptoms. The chances are excellent that they can help you too. But it is critical for your doctor to guide you through this process. That’s why building a good relationship with your healthcare provider is so important. And the sooner you see your doctor, the sooner you can find allergy relief.

Your doctor’s first step will be to determine whether your symptoms really come from an allergy or some other health problem. You may have skin or blood tests to find out exactly what you are allergic to. Next, your doctor will consider which allergy treatments may be appropriate in your case. If a drug is recommended, writing a prescription isn’t the end: your doctor will also need to monitor your response to the medication over time. It may take some trial and error to find the best allergy medicines for you. The same drug that works wonders for one patient may have little or no benefit for another.

This guide isn’t a replacement for a doctor’s visit. Here we’ll cover tips to help you communicate effectively with your doctor and specific questions to ask — all things to help you get the most out of your relationship with your healthcare provider.

Looking for a Doctor?

You’re likely to start diagnosis and treatment for seasonal allergies by seeing your family doctor or general practitioner. He or she may refer you to an allergist or other specialist. An allergist is a doctor with years of specialized training in diagnosing and treating allergies and asthma.
How to Communicate Effectively with Your Doctor

Actual face-time with your doctor can be precious little. You may wait for weeks for an appointment and then go through what feels like a whirlwind visit only to leave with more questions than answers about your seasonal allergy symptoms and other health concerns.

“Make sure your doctor knows the whole story, including the extent of your symptoms, your worries and any treatment or medication you are taking on your own.”

Studies show the average amount of time patients spend with the doctor is less than 20 minutes. Since this is your only time with the doctor, make the most of it by asking important questions and expressing concerns.

Communicating effectively with your doctor will allow you to share information and work together to make the best decisions about your health, resulting in the best possible care for you. Try incorporating these tips to get what you need from your doctor’s visits.

Be prepared. Before your appointment, write down your questions, items to discuss and any changes in your condition. Make a list of things that have happened since your last visit and think about ways to describe your symptoms. If you are organized you can make the best use of your time and your doctor’s expertise.

These three lists are useful to have:

* **Medication List:** List all medications you are taking, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, supplements and herbal remedies. Your list should include the name of the medication, strength and dosage as well as any side effects you’re noticing.

* **Symptom Diary:** Keep a record of your seasonal allergy symptoms. Write down each different symptom you notice, how strong it is, and whether it varies at different times of the day as well as different times of year. Note possible triggers, such as yard work or spending time outdoors in the morning when pollen levels may be higher. And tell whether your allergy medication seems to make a difference. Think of your symptom diary as a source of clues to help your doctor do the detective work that will lead to a correct diagnosis and effective treatment.

* **Questions List:** Write down all of the questions you want to ask the doctor. There is a list of questions at the end of this guide to help you.
Consider bringing a family member or friend. Having someone along can help you relax and remember to ask the right questions. They can also help you remember what the doctor told you.

Be confident. Don’t be afraid to ask questions. If something is confusing ask the doctor to explain more clearly.

Be honest. Make sure your doctor knows the whole story, including the extent of your symptoms, your worries and any treatment or medication you are taking on your own. Don’t be embarrassed to share details. Your doctor needs this information to treat you well.

Take notes. Write down important information or instructions, so you can remember the doctor’s advice later.

Prioritize your concerns. Remember that you have limited time. Start with the most important topics for which you really want answers. You can always follow up with nurses or with a phone call later for smaller issues.

Repeat key points. Repeating things will help your doctor to clarify anything that has been confusing and will help you remember what has been discussed.

Can you exercise outdoors if you have seasonal allergies?

In many cases, yes! Exercise is important for everyone. If you are getting treated for your seasonal allergies and taking precautions, you may not have to limit outdoor exercise very much.

Cut back on outdoor exercise when pollen counts are at their peak. Know what time of year the pollen you are allergic to is in season. Check the daily pollen count online or in the local newspaper. And exercise at the right time of day: some experts say to stay indoors early in the morning when fresh pollen is released, while others say that most pollens peak around the middle of the day.

The harder you breathe, the more allergens you will inhale – so consider less strenuous exercise on high-pollen days. And as soon as you get home, change your clothes and take a shower so you don’t spread invisible pollen throughout your home.
When pollen or air pollution levels are too high, take your exercise indoors. An air-conditioned room is great for maximum comfort with minimum pollen. Always check with your doctor before starting any new exercise routine.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

Whether you’re newly diagnosed or have suffered with seasonal allergies for years, clear dialogue with your doctor is an important part of getting properly treated. By talking openly and regularly with your doctor, you can take an active role in your care.

Here are some questions to consider asking your doctor to spark conversation.

About Seasonal Allergies
How do you know that I have seasonal allergies? What tests are used for diagnosing them?
Are there other conditions that could be causing my symptoms?
What causes seasonal allergies?
What do you think I am allergic to?
How can seasonal allergies affect my body?

About Your Doctor
Have you treated many cases of seasonal allergies?
How much do you read current research on seasonal allergies and new treatments?
Should I see a specialist?
What changes in my symptoms should I call you about? How can I reach you if I need to in between appointments?

About Treatment Options
What tests do I need? What will we learn from them?
How are seasonal allergies treated? What medications are used?
What are the benefits and side effects of these treatments?
What is your plan to control my seasonal allergy symptoms? Are there alternatives?
Is there a generic version of the prescription drug you recommend?
Will my allergy medicine relieve symptoms immediately? How long will it last? Should I take it a certain number of times every day, or only as needed?
Could over-the-counter allergy medicines help me?
Will my allergy medicine interact with other medications, over-the-counter products, dietary or herbal supplements I am already taking?
Are allergy shots appropriate for me?
What about alternative or complementary therapies for my symptoms?
How will you monitor my progress?

**About Lifestyle Changes**
What types of changes should I make to my lifestyle to help control my allergies?
What types of things trigger flare-ups? What should I avoid?
Can I exercise outdoors? What types of exercises should I do? Are there any types of exercises I should avoid?
When symptoms flare up, what can I do to feel well enough to continue my usual daily activities?

**About the Future**
How much relief can I expect seasonal allergy treatments to provide?
Is my condition likely to be temporary or chronic?
Will my seasonal allergies get worse over time?
How can I explain my condition to my family, friends, and employer?
Where can I get more information about this condition?
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