

Health And Well-Being

How To Survive Seasonal Allergies

(NAPSA)—Allergies affect one in five Americans and, for many of them, springtime is the worst season of all. That's because spring is the time of year when tree pollens are in the air, causing seasonal allergic rhinitis (inflammation of the nasal mucous membrane). When springtime follows a particularly wet winter, allergies triggered by tree pollen may increase. Making matters worse, later in spring, grass pollen also affects many of the same people who are allergic to tree pollen.

The symptoms of seasonal allergies are easy to confuse with the common cold: stuffy and/or runny nose, sneezing, red and itchy eyes and a sore throat are among the usual symptoms. But colds are caused by the body's natural protective response to a virus, while allergy symptoms are a reaction by the body's immune system to a substance (known as allergens) that is normally harmless. In response to the perceived threat of the presence of allergens, the body produces histamines—chemicals that cause swelling in nasal passages, airways, skin and even the intestinal tract.

New research offers hope for allergy vaccine

Recent scientific advances continue to offer hope that new approaches to controlling allergies may yield dramatic results in the near future.

One area of focus has been research into the mechanism by which the body learns to incorrectly perceive allergens as threatening. A team of scientists at McGill University in Canada recently identified a specific molecule—known as STAT6—that plays a key role in the development and transmission of the body's allergic responses. The researchers then developed a specific “inhibitor peptide” (called STAT6-IP) to block the action of STAT6. They tested the inhibitor by administering it in nasal droplets to newborn mice.

Later, when they tried to stimulate allergic reactions in the mice by exposing them to a variety of allergens, the mice that had received the inhibitor nose drops shortly after birth did not develop allergic responses. As a result of the early exposure to the inhibitor, the scientists concluded, the immune system of the mice learned to tolerate the allergens



Seasonal allergies are nothing to sneeze at, but keeping the air in your home as pollen- and pollution-free as possible can help.

rather than to react defensively against otherwise harmless substances. The scientists are hoping to apply their findings in clinical trials with humans in the near future, offering hope for a potential vaccine someday for allergies.

Strategies for controlling seasonal allergies

While researchers continue to focus on a vaccine to control allergic responses, there are steps you can take now to help moderate the effects of allergens during peak seasonal-allergy times. Here are some time-proven tips to take control of seasonal allergies:

1. Minimize outdoor activities in the morning. Pollen counts are typically highest during the early hours of the day. Whenever possible, avoid outdoor activities during these hours.

2. Change clothes frequently. When you arrive home, especially after working outdoors, change clothes and take a shower to get rid of as many allergens as possible.

3. Close windows. If you suffer from allergies, resist the temptation to open up the windows to the pleasant springtime air. Many people like to sleep with windows open during the spring, which allows more pollen to enter the home.

4. Keep the indoor air as clean as possible. Use a high-performance air purifier, such as the IQAir HealthPro Plus (www.iqair.com), to remove allergens from the air. Also, vacuum frequently with a high-performance HEPA vacuum cleaner to remove allergens that have settled from the air.

These simple steps can reduce the levels of airborne pollen in your air at home, easing your springtime allergies and helping everyone in the house breathe better during periods when seasonal allergies are at their highest levels.