



Ask The Pharmacist

Allergy Season: It's Nothing To Sneeze At

(NAPSA)—Almost 40 million Americans face seasonal allergies, which usually begin in the spring and can last through the first frost. They're often triggered by pollens, molds or other airborne allergens. According to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology, Americans spend as much as \$4.5 billion annually on medications and doctor visits to treat their allergies.



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The first step in treatment is to reduce exposure to specific allergens. If that's not possible, managing symptoms through medication is often next.

Here are some tips to help control your allergies:

Know Your Triggers: To avoid an allergen, you need to know what it is. Physicians can determine what you're allergic to by reviewing your personal and medical history or doing a physical exam. In some cases a skin, patch or blood test may be used to confirm suspected allergens.

Create a Sneeze-free Environment: A few changes at home can make a difference. Use an air conditioner whenever possible, make your home "dust mite" unfriendly by vacuuming often, use hypoallergenic products and check pollen counts before going out. If they're high, stay inside.

Find the Right Remedy: Antihistamines reduce symptoms and work best if taken before exposure to allergens. Decongestants should only be used for a short time as they can worsen the condition. Nasal sprays, known as inhaled steroids, are another option.

Know the OTC Options: Doctors may recommend over-the-counter medications as a first-line



Medications used to treat allergies include antihistamines, decongestants and nasal sprays, both over-the-counter and prescription.

treatment. Those that include diphenhydramine have been an allergy staple for years but can cause drowsiness. Newer non-sedating antihistamines, such as Claritin, are now available without a prescription. OTCs are usually far less expensive than prescription drugs and are now covered under pretax health care accounts, such as FSAs and HSAs.

Consider Generics: They can be as effective as brand-name medications and cost 30 to 80 percent less. Popular allergy medications Allegra and Flonase are now available as generics—fexofenadine and fluticasone. According to a recent Medco analysis, 80 percent of all Allegra prescriptions were filled with a generic at retail pharmacies within 30 days of its introduction.

Discuss the options with your doctor. With the right knowledge and treatments, you can spend more time outside and less time concerned about watery eyes, a runny nose and the cost of medication.

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