

WHAT IS ALLERGIC RHINITIS?

Allergic rhinitis (also known as “hay fever” or “allergies”) is a condition that affects the mucus membranes of the nose. The eyes and sometimes the palate or throat are also often affected.

What are the symptoms?

You may experience some or all of the symptoms of allergies, which include sneezing, nasal congestion (stiffness), runny nose, and itchiness in the nose, roof of the mouth, throat, eyes, and ears. Less frequently postnasal drainage may cause a cough or excessive throat clearing.

What causes allergies?

Allergic rhinitis is an overreaction to certain foreign matter in the environment called allergy triggers or allergens. Potential allergens include dust, mold, pollens, animal dander, and cockroaches. Exposure to these allergens cause certain cells in the mucus membranes of the nose to release histamine, leukotrienes and other chemical substances which cause the symptoms.

Are there complications?

Sometimes allergic rhinitis leads to complications such as ear infections, sinusitis, recurrent sore throat, asthma, cough, headaches, altered sleep patterns, fatigue, irritability and poor work or school performance. Preventing these complications is one reason why it is important to have your allergies properly treated.

What is the treatment?

Avoidance measures. Whenever possible you should avoid the inhaled allergens that cause you to react. It is also important to avoid irritating substances such as smoke, chemicals, or strong odors.

Medications. A variety of medication is available today to treat allergic rhinitis. The medication (s) prescribed for you will represent a treatment plan that has been individualized to suit your condition. For example, your doctor may prescribe an antihistamine, a leukotriene modifier, nasal steroid and/or other types of medications.

Allergy Immunization. Allergy immunization (“allergy shots”) or desensitization is another method of treatment. This helps you build your own immunity to the allergens and usually reduces symptoms and medication requirements over a period of time. The treatment option can be discussed with your physician.

What about over-the-counter medications or herbal remedies?

You should only take the medications prescribed or approved by your doctor. Many over-the-counter allergy medications or herbal remedies can cause unwanted side effects. For example, some nonprescription antihistamines cause significant drowsiness which can impair your ability to drive, operate machinery or perform at school or work.

Also DO NOT use over-the-counter decongestant nasal sprays for more than 3 days in a row unless specifically advised to do so by your physician. These sprays can cause undesirable side effects and actually cause more nasal congestion after a period of time.

Contact your physician if:

Your medication is not effective in reducing your symptoms.

Your medication is causing undesirable side effects.

You have further questions or concerns about your allergies.