



Our Health Advisory Board expert, Martha White, MD, talks about prepping for

allergy season

by Barbara Brody

Is it true that seasonal allergy sufferers should start taking medication before peak season hits?

Definitely. If you're allergic to tree pollen, for example, you'll probably notice some signs of hay fever (sneezing, nasal congestion, etc.) as soon as the trees in your area start to bloom. (You can get info on pollen counts at aaaai.org/nab) Your symptoms might seem manageable at first, but they can snowball: Once your nasal passages are irritated, being exposed to pollen will cause them to flare up even more, making symptoms worse and harder to treat. Taking medication sooner rather than later can prevent this. I prescribe nasal steroids for many of my patients, and I recommend that they start using them the minute their nose tells them that allergy season is on its way.

Can you develop allergies for the first time as an adult?

Yes, but the majority of people with allergies did have them as kids—and many of them find that symptoms become less severe as they age. Often, moving to a new area or getting a new pet can cause allergies to kick in. In some cases, you might have had allergies all along but were never diagnosed—especially if you remember having lots of colds or always having a runny nose when you were little.

Can you inherit allergies?

Yes—if you suffer from allergies, your kids will each have about a 40 percent chance of developing them. If both parents are allergic, a child has an 80 percent chance of being allergic. (They may or may not inherit the same type of allergies, so you could have a reaction to, say, dust mites, and your child might be allergic to tree pollen.) But if allergies don't run in your family, you're not in the clear: Plenty of people without a family history still develop them. *(Please turn to 66)*

5 SUREFIRE WAYS TO BE LESS SNEEZY AND WHEEZY

1. Keep doors and windows closed during peak season so pollen stays outside.
2. Use allergen-proof pillows and mattress protectors to avoid dust mites, and wash your bedding in hot water once a week.
3. Bathe pets frequently and keep them out of the bedroom.
4. Dust and vacuum at least weekly.
5. Buy a HEPA filter for your bedroom; it will help remove particles from the air that can be irritating. Measure the room before you go shopping, since you'll need to pick one that fits your space. (You should see the recommended room size listed on the label.)

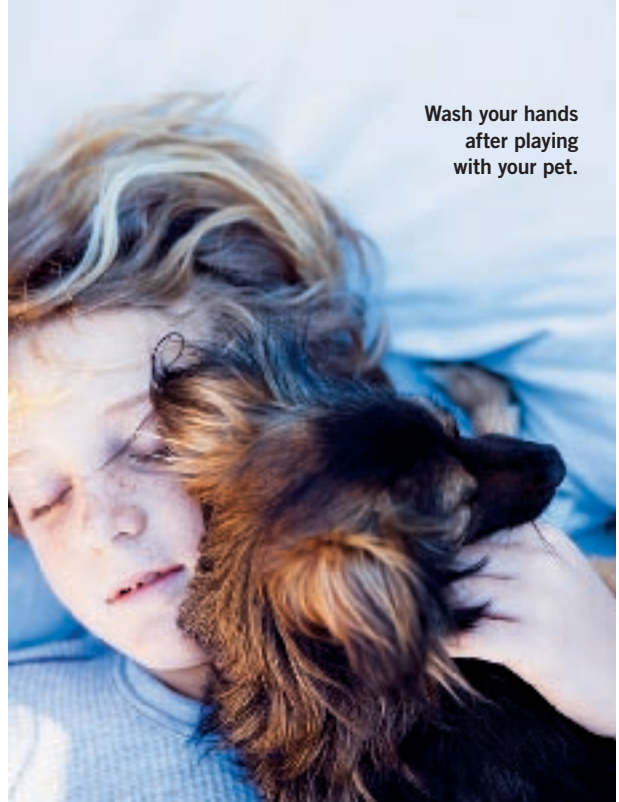
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How can you tell if your symptoms are caused by a cold or allergies?

Respiratory infections generally last a week or two and may be accompanied by achiness and fever. With allergies you're more likely to feel sneezy or itchy, and the symptoms may last several weeks or even months. (And if you suffer from seasonal allergies, they'll flare up around the same time each year.) Another clue is to see how family and coworkers are doing. Colds spread from person to person very easily, so if it's a cold, chances are you won't be the only one feeling under the weather.

- **FOR MORE INFO**
- **The American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology (aaaai.org)**
- **American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (acaai.org)**
- **Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (aafa.org)**



Wash your hands after playing with your pet.

To ask a question, go to womansday.com/drwd

THE BEST REMEDY FOR YOUR SYMPTOMS

Figure out which treatments to choose with our handy guide.

YOUR SYMPTOMS	BEST OTC REMEDY	RX OPTIONS	WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW
Sneezy, itchy, runny nose and/or itchy, tingly throat (post-nasal drip) and/or itchy ears	Zyrtec (an antihistamine)	Prescription antihistamines (Clarinet, Allegra or Xyzal), nasal steroid sprays (like Nasonex) or a leukotriene modifier (like Singulair)	Zyrtec is one of the best allergy medications (it's long-lasting and won't make you sleepy), and it's now available OTC, says Dr. White. Many people also respond well to prescription nasal steroid sprays, which reduce inflammation.
Congestion	Claritin-D (decongestant and antihistamine)	Combination steroid nasal sprays (like Nasonex and Veramyst) or a prescription decongestant/antihistamine (like Allegra-D)	Although you don't need a prescription, you have to ask your pharmacist for Claritin-D because it contains pseudoephedrine, an ingredient that is sold in limited quantities.
Itchy, watery eyes	Antihistamine/decongestant eye drops (such as Naphcon-A)	Mast cell-stabilizing or antihistamine eye drops (such as Patanol)	Flushing out your eyes with saline solution may also help.
Itchy skin	Moisturizing cream (if your skin is dry) and Zyrtec	An antihistamine (such as Clarinet, Allegra, or Xyzal)	Cortisone and Benadryl cream can be used to spot-treat, but if you feel like you need them all over, use an oral antihistamine (OTC or prescription) instead, says Dr. White.
Wheezing and/or shortness of breath	None	Inhaled steroids (such as Pulmicort and Flovent) or Singulair and/or a rescue inhaler (bronchodilator)	If your allergies are affecting your lungs, you probably have some degree of asthma. See your doctor right away to get tested.

