

LIVE WELL

Allergy relief: Timing is everything

For nearly 40 percent of us, springtime and sneezing go hand-in-hand. You're probably familiar with many feel-better tips, but did you know that *when* you follow that advice also matters? Here's the best time to:

Take an oral antihistamine *right before bed.* "These drugs (Zyrtec, Allegra, Claritin) take six to eight hours to fully circulate through your system, and you want that to happen around the time that you head outside for the day," says Neal Jain, M.D., a fellow of the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology. Plus, some antihistamine meds can cause drowsiness.

Dust and vacuum *in the morning.* Because you've taken an antihistamine the night before, your system will be amply protected against any allergens that cleaning stirs up, Jain says. He recommends Swiffer cloths for dusting because they latch onto particles instead of scattering them into the air.

Shower *as soon as you come home.* You'll wash away the allergens stuck to your skin and hair. Also consider a saline nasal rinse (available over the counter) to clear your sinuses.



Use an antihistamine spray *one hour before exercising outside.* These meds, such as Astepro, Patanase, and Dymista, kick in fairly quickly, making your bike ride or power walk that much more pleasant.

Start nasal steroid sprays *one to two weeks before allergy season hits your area.* (Go to accuweather.com and pull up the allergies tab for guidance.) Research shows that these meds can be more effective than antihistamines, but they work best when you let them build up in your system.

—Barbara Brody