



***Sneezing. Watery, itchy eyes. Stuffed-up nose. Runny, itchy nose. Fatigue, irritability. Trouble concentrating . . .***

These are some of the common symptoms of seasonal allergies (otherwise known as “hay fever”) that afflict millions of Americans from early spring all the way through late fall. Pollens from trees, grasses, and weeds can trigger allergy symptoms. While there are no cures, at least there are ways you can prevent and ease the symptoms.

### **Avoid Exposure**

The first and most obvious thing to do is avoid contact with the allergen (whatever substance is causing you this misery). Most people who suffer from allergies each year know what brings them on. Allergy tests to figure out exactly what causes the allergy are usually not necessary unless a person has severe symptoms not helped by usual treatments.

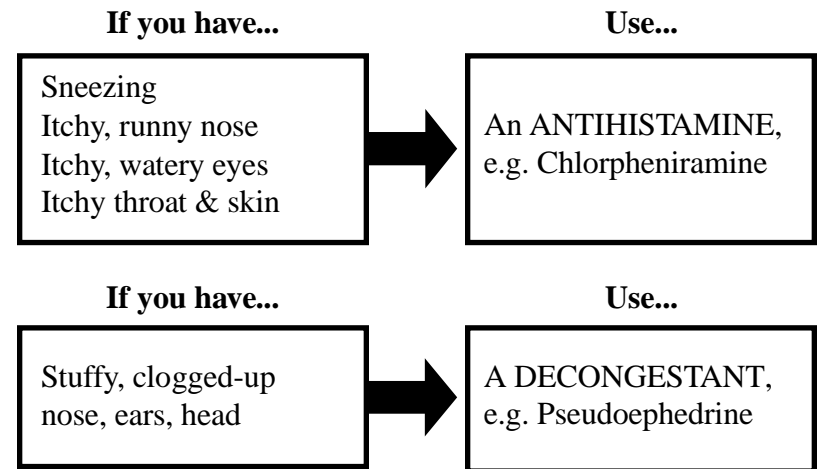
Allergens as widespread as pollens are nearly impossible to avoid completely, but you can reduce the amount of allergens in the air you breathe . . .

- **Stay Indoors** as much as possible, especially on days when pollen counts are high (check your newspaper for pollen counts).
- If you can, **keep your doors and windows closed** (including car windows) and use an **air conditioner**.
- Keep your home thoroughly **clean** to reduce dust in the air.
- **Stay away** from air pollutants and irritating substances like fresh paint, insect sprays, animal danders, and feathers.

## **Allergy Relief Medicines**

When you can’t avoid the allergen completely, proper use of medicines may help prevent and ease your symptoms. **If allergy medicines haven’t worked well for you in the past or caused bothersome side effects, you may be in for a pleasant surprise.** By first reading through this whole brochure and then carefully following the instructions, you can often simply and safely find great relief from these medications, many of which are available over-the-counter. Also see the labeling on each medicine container for important information. You may need to take the medicines for several days or more to get the full benefit.

If you have questions or special concerns, please contact your pharmacist or physician.



**You may also use these medicines together.**



## About ANTIHISTAMINES (e.g. Chlorpheniramine)

Antihistamines temporarily relieve symptoms such as sneezing and runny nose by inhibiting or blocking the actions of allergens. Antihistamines work best if they are already in your body, before the allergen can trigger symptoms. **To get full benefit from your antihistamine, take it regularly (everyday), throughout the allergy season.**

**Side Effects:** Antihistamines rarely cause serious side effects but can cause some drowsiness, dryness of the mouth and stomach upset. If it isn't too severe the drowsiness usually goes away in a couple of days as your body adjusts to your steady use of the medicine.

The **drowsiness can be lessened** by adjusting your dose of antihistamine: Start with a full dose at bedtime and, if that doesn't control your symptoms, then add a smaller dose during the day.

Other drugs that affect alertness, like alcohol, tranquilizers and sleeping pills, can add to the drowsiness effect of the antihistamine. Make sure you know how you react to this medicine before you drive or do other things that require you to be alert.

**Precaution:** If you are pregnant or breast-feeding or have glaucoma or difficulty urinating because of an enlarged prostate gland, check with your doctor before taking this medicine. Antihistamines can cause a thickening of mucus which may, on rare occasions, be a problem for some asthmatics. Check with your doctor if you have questions about this.

## About DECONGESTANTS (e.g. Pseudoephedrine)

Allergens can make the lining of your nose, lungs and ears swell up and leave you feeling stuffed-up and miserable. Decongestants relieve this feeling by shrinking those linings back to a more normal size.

Decongestants may be taken alone or with antihistamines. **Unlike** antihistamines, decongestants can be taken just when you have symptoms. Regular, daily use may **not** be necessary.

**Side Effects:** Decongestants can make you feel nervous, restless or jittery. If these side effects are not too severe, they'll usually decrease or disappear as your body adjusts to the medicine. Using a smaller dose (½ tablet) or taking the medicine **only during the daytime and not before sleeping may help**. Also, try to stay away from caffeine (in coffee, tea, colas, "stay awake" pills, etc.) as much as you can, because it adds to the restlessness caused by the decongestant.

**Precaution:** If you are pregnant or breast-feeding or have high blood pressure, heart problems or diabetes, check with your doctor before taking this medicine.

## More Self-Care Suggestions

Proper use of an antihistamine and/or decongestant will usually clear up **most** of your allergy symptoms. Occasionally, people suffering from allergies may need to use additional treatments for a few days to get relief from headaches, itchy eyes, etc.

**FOR HEADACHES:** Minor headaches caused by congestion can usually be relieved with **aspirin** or **acetaminophen** (Tylenol, etc.), available without a prescription. If your headache is especially severe or persistent or if you have pain in your cheeks, upper teeth or ears, please contact your doctor.

**FOR EYES:** Itching and irritated eyes can often be soothed by applying cold compresses to the eyelids 4 to 5 times a day. Just soak a wash cloth in cold water, and lay it over your eyes for a few minutes. Over-the-counter eye drops (e.g., artificial tears) may also provide short term relief.

**FOR STUFFY NOSES:** Salt water nose drops are safe and effective for relieving a stuffy nose. You can either buy salt water nose drops over-the-counter or make your own by mixing ¼ teaspoon of salt in a cup (8 ounces) of warm water.

There is no "*most effective*" medicine for everyone. Each person reacts differently so you should keep a record of the medicines you've tried and which ones helped relieve your symptoms. Medicines given by prescription are not necessarily more effective than over-the-counter medicines in relieving your symptoms.

Be careful about using multiple over-the-counter (non-prescription) allergy or sinus medicines. Many of these products contain combinations of medicines which you may already be taking or don't even need. So read the labels carefully.

## A Final Word

You can purchase some over-the-counter antihistamines and decongestants from your Kaiser Permanente pharmacy. You don't need a prescription.

Any medicine can cause unwanted side effects. If you experience any unusual or severe side effects while taking medicines, please contact your doctor, pharmacist or advice nurse.

