

Drugs that affect alertness, such as alcohol, tranquilizers, and sleeping pills, can add to the drowsiness effect of antihistamines. Make sure you know how the antihistamine affects you before driving or doing other tasks that require alertness. The “non-drowsy” antihistamine, loratadine (Claritin, Alavert), is now available over the counter.

Decongestants

Decongestants help to relieve the stuffy feeling in your nose and ears. They also help to relieve postnasal drip which can cause a sore throat. Decongestants may be taken alone or with antihistamines. The most common side effects of decongestants are nervousness, restlessness, or a jittery feeling which may decrease or disappear as your body adjusts to the medicine. Taking the decongestant only during the day and avoiding caffeine may also help.

Note:

If your allergies are not controlled by these measures, you may wish to contact your doctor for a prescription for an anti-inflammatory nasal inhaler such as Nasarel. When used on a daily basis, anti-inflammatory nasal inhalers provide excellent relief of symptoms in most patients with no drowsiness and few side effects.

MORE ALLERGY TREATMENT TIPS

Proper use of antihistamines and decongestants will clear up most allergy symptoms. Sometimes people need other treatments to get relief from headache or itchy eyes.

For headaches:

Minor headaches caused by stuffiness can be relieved with acetaminophen (generic Tylenol). Call your health care provider if your headaches are severe or occur often.

For itchy eyes:

Itchy, irritated eyes can be soothed by soaking a washcloth in cold water. Lay the washcloth over your eyes 4 to 5 times a day. Over-the-counter (OTC) eye drops, such as artificial tears (soothing) or Opcon-A (medicated), can also help.

Some Advantages of OTC Medicines:

- No doctor appointment is needed to get them.
- They are usually less expensive than the average prescription co-payment.
- They are conveniently available at Kaiser Permanente Pharmacies.
- They are as safe and effective as prescription forms of the same medicine.

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Allergy Medicines

GET THE FACTS



Do you suffer from seasonal allergies?

Be prepared with over-the-counter (OTC) allergy relief medicines.

Allergies come in many forms. Hay fever (allergic rhinitis)—with its symptoms of itchy, watery eyes; sneezing; runny or stuffy nose—is the most common form. An estimated 40–50 million Americans suffer with hay fever during the spring, early summer, or early fall when grass, weed, or tree pollens are in the air. Fortunately, there are a number of steps you can take to manage hay fever: 1) learn what you're allergic to and avoid these *triggers*, if possible, 2) reduce exposure to allergy triggers inside the home, 3) use allergy medicines appropriately.

PREVENTION

Controlling allergy triggers

- Avoid yard work and outdoor activities when pollen counts are high.
- Wash off after outdoor activity, especially your hair; change clothes; rinse your nasal membranes with saline nose spray.
- Keep your home, especially your bedroom, as dust-free and mold-free as possible. Remove carpets and other dust collectors. Use an allergy cover for your mattresses and pillows. Consider an air purifier with a special HEPA filter.
- Keep your house and car windows closed and use the air conditioner.
- Groom pets and keep them outside or at least out of the bedroom.
- Avoid smoking and exposure to smoke, sprays, room deodorizers, perfumes, and other irritating substances.

For more information on allergies and when to see your health care provider, see your Healthwise Handbook or log onto our Web site members.kp.org.

TREATMENT

Allergy medicines can help to prevent and relieve symptoms as shown in the table below. There is no “most effective” medicine for everyone. Keep a record of the medicines you’ve tried and which ones work for you. Over-the-counter (OTC) allergy medicines are as safe and effective as prescription medicines and often have the same ingredients. Ask your pharmacist for help selecting the right OTC products for your symptoms. Be sure to read the package labeling for dosing information, as well as special precautions, especially if you are pregnant, breastfeeding, or have other medical conditions.

Antihistamines

Antihistamines treat allergy symptoms such as runny nose, sneezing and itching. They rarely cause serious side effects, but some antihistamines can cause drowsiness, dry mouth, and constipation. Taking the antihistamine at bedtime can decrease the drowsiness effect.

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PRODUCT	SYMPTOMS TREATED			
	THROAT itchy, scratchy	NOSE itchy, runny	NOSE stuffy, congested	EYES itchy, scratchy
Tablets and Liquids				
Antihistamines:				
• Chlorpheniramine tablets, liquid (ChlorTrimeton)	✓	✓		✓
• Loratadine tablets, liquid (Claritin, Alavert)	✓	✓		✓
Decongestants:				
• Pseudoephedrine tablets, liquid (Sudafed)			✓	
• Phenylephrine Tablets (Sudafed PE)			✓	
Combinations: Antihistamine + Decongestant				
• Loratadine-D tablets (Claritin D)	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Sudafed-Plus tablets	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Dimetapp Cold & Allergy liquid	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nose Sprays				
• Saline Nose Spray (Ocean)			✓	
• Cromolyn Nose Spray (Nasal crom)		✓	✓	
• Sinus Rinse Kit			✓	
Eye Drops				
• Artificial Tears Eye Drops				✓
• Naphazoline/Pheniramine Eye Drops (Opcon-A)				✓

Brand names are given for reference, not as an endorsement by Kaiser Permanente.