



Drug FAQs for Members

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Allergy Relief Medicines

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What causes allergies?

- An allergic reaction occurs when your body's immune system reacts to a foreign substance ("allergen") such as pollen or dust.
- In response to the allergen, your body releases a chemical called histamine that causes symptoms such as a runny nose, itchy eyes and sneezing.

What can I do to help prevent allergy symptoms?

- The best thing is to know what triggers your symptoms and avoid them.
 - Stay indoors when pollen counts are high. Check your newspaper or the internet at <http://www.aaaai.org> (National Allergy Bureau) for pollen information.
 - Keep your doors and windows closed and use an air conditioner instead.
 - Keep your home thoroughly clean to reduce dust in the air.
 - Shower after coming in from outdoors, with special attention to your hair – put on fresh clothing.
 - Wash hands to remove pollens and do not rub face or eyes with hands.
 - For more information, please ask your provider for the "Avoid Your Allergy Triggers" document.

What types of allergy medications are available without a prescription?

- Antihistamines such as loratadine (Claritin, Alavert) and chlorpheniramine "non-drowsy" provide relief from sneezing, runny nose and itching.
- Decongestants like pseudoephedrine and phenylephrine provide relief from stuffy nose and ears.
- Eye drops such as Artificial Tears, Zaditor or Opcon-A can help treat irritated, itchy eyes.
- Saline nasal sprays, such as Ocean, help moisten and cleanse nasal membranes and loosen mucus.
- The Sinus Rinse Kit can be helpful for washing thick mucus from the nose, cleansing nasal membranes, and relieving nasal dryness.
- If your allergies are not controlled with over-the-counter medications, you may wish to contact your physician for a prescription anti-inflammatory nasal spray.

How do the prescription nasal sprays treat allergy symptoms?

- Nasal symptoms are caused when nasal passages become inflamed by the body's response to allergens.
- Prescription anti-inflammatory nasal sprays decrease the inflammation of the lining in your nose and relieve sneezing, itchy nose and congestion. They are the most effective group of medications for chronic treatment of allergy symptoms.
- Prescription nasal sprays do not work immediately and may take a few days to notice the benefit.
- They provide non-drowsy relief and have few side effects.
- If you also use a saline spray or sinus rinse kit, wait at least 15 minutes before using the prescription nasal spray to allow the saline to completely drain.
- For best administration when using nasal sprays, tilt your head forward and point the spray away from the septum (the wall between the nostrils). Use your RIGHT hand when spraying the LEFT nostril and your LEFT hand for the RIGHT nostril. Alternate sides if you use more than one spray per nostril.