



Allergies come in many forms, but “hay fever” (allergic rhinitis) is the most common. Finding ways to avoid things like pollen or dust that may trigger your allergies can help.

Symptoms can include:

- sneezing repeatedly
- runny, stuffy, or itchy nose
- itchy, watery eyes
- temporary loss of smell
- headache
- postnasal drip
- feeling tired

Recognizing allergy symptoms

Allergy symptoms may seem like cold symptoms, but they usually last longer. A child or adult with a stuffy nose caused by allergies may breathe through their mouth and frequently rub their nose. Particles in the air, such as pollen, house dust mites, animal dander, and mold or mildew are the most common cause. Allergies seem to run in families. If your parents had allergies, it’s likely that you will too. Allergic rhinitis often starts in childhood, but can occur at any age.

If you or your partner has a history of allergies, consider breastfeeding your infants. Feeding only breast milk during the first 6 months of life may delay or lessen food allergies.

What’s causing my allergies?

To find out what is causing your allergies, keep track of when you have symptoms. Classic hay fever symptoms occur at the same time each year, especially during spring, early summer, or early fall. Tree, grass, or weed pollen are the usual culprits. Allergies that seem to last all year long may be due to house dust mites, animals, or mold spores. If you notice that you always sneeze around your dog or cat, it’s pretty clear that you are allergic to dander. If dander is your only allergy, staying away from pets will help.

What you can do

There is no cure for allergic rhinitis. But staying away from things that cause allergy attacks will help. Discovering and avoiding the source of your allergy is the best treatment. To figure out your triggers, keep track of your symptoms. Note when you are exposed to pollen, dust mites, animals, or mold. This can help you identify and avoid your triggers.

Medications

If staying away from the source of your allergies does not help, using medicines that lessen symptoms is the next step. Over-the-counter antihistamines, such as loratadine, are often good at relieving sneezing, runny nose, itching, and watery eyes. Decongestants also help reduce stuffy nose and saline mists help thin out thick nasal mucus. Prescription nasal sprays are often

more effective at reducing symptoms than oral medicines. It may take a combination of medications to help you feel better. Ask your doctor for more information.

Alternative treatments

There are many alternative treatments promoted to help allergies. But, as yet, we don’t have enough scientific evidence to support the safety or effectiveness of alternative treatments. Because side effects may be a concern, please talk to your doctor before you decide to use an alternative treatment.

What about allergy shots or immunotherapy?

Allergy shots are a series of injections given over 3 - 5 years. This treatment lessens your body’s sensitivity to allergens (i.e., pollen, house dust mites, and animals). Allergy shots or immunotherapy is 80 percent effective for these allergens. But this kind of treatment only works well if we can identify the specific allergen through testing. Allergy shots are usually considered as a treatment option when:

- Your symptoms have bothered you for at least 2 years.
- You’ve tried home treatment without success.
- You’ve tried both prescription and nonprescription medications without relief.
- Tests show the specific allergies.

If your symptoms get worse over time, and home treatment doesn’t help, your medical professional can recommend different medications or immunotherapy.

Tips to help manage your allergies

<p>If your symptoms are seasonal, follow these suggestions during the pollen season:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your windows and vents closed, especially in the bedroom and car. • Limit the time you spend outside when pollen counts are high. • Pets that spend time outdoors may bring large amounts of pollen into your house. If possible, leave the pets outside or clean them before letting them indoors.
<p>If your symptoms are year-round and seem to be related to dust:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep the bedroom as dust-free as possible, as most of your time at home is spent there. Keep the rest of your house as clean as possible. • Try to reduce carpeting, upholstered furniture, and heavy draperies. Also reduce household items that can collect dust. Vacuum weekly with a cleaner equipped with a HEPA filter and/or special bags. • If you are allergic to dust mites, cover your pillows, mattress, and boxspring with dust-proof covers. You can buy these at many large retail outlets. Avoid wool blankets or down comforters and feather pillows. Wash all bedding weekly in hot water. • Keep the house well ventilated and dry. Keep the humidity low. Use a dehumidifier during humid weather.
<p>If your symptoms are year-round, worsen in damp weather, and seem to be related to mold or mildew:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An air conditioner can help reduce humidity. Change or clean heating and cooling system filters regularly. • Clean bathroom and kitchen surfaces often with bleach to reduce mold growth.
<p>If you are allergic to a pet:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If your symptoms are severe, the best solution may be to find a new home for the pet. • Otherwise keep the animal outside, or at least out of your bedroom.

When to call Kaiser Permanente

Severe allergic reactions require immediate care. Call your doctor, or if you think you have a medical emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital if you have any of these signs:

- severe wheezing or difficulty breathing
- swelling around the lips, tongue, or face
- lightheadedness or dizziness
- skin rash, itching, feeling of warmth, or hives

General information on avoiding irritants and allergens

- Avoid yard work (raking, mowing) or at least wear a mask. Yard work can stir up both pollen and mold.
- Avoid smoking and inhaling other people's smoke.
- Don't use aerosol sprays, fragrances, room deodorizers, and cleaning products that may add to the problem.

Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, Healthy Living classes, and much more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, Healthy Living programs, and other resources.

Emergency services and care are covered if you were experiencing acute symptoms of sufficient severity, including severe pain, such that you reasonably believed that a failure to obtain immediate medical attention could result in serious jeopardy to health, serious impairment to bodily functions, or serious dysfunction of any bodily organ or part.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor. If you have questions or need additional information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.