

## ALLERGIC RHINITIS

Allergic Rhinitis is caused by inflammation of the nasal passages and upper respiratory tract after exposure to an allergen. Symptoms of allergic rhinitis include nasal congestion, clear runny nose, throat itching and irritation, post-nasal drip, eye itchiness and sneezing. For some people these symptoms wax and wane and vary with the seasons; for others these symptoms are chronic and persist year-round.

For those with seasonal or intermittent allergic rhinitis, the allergens most commonly causing the symptoms are pollens from trees, grasses and weeds, or intermittent exposure to animal dander (pets).

For those with chronic symptoms, the allergens most commonly causing the symptoms are dust mites, cockroaches, animal dander (with persistent exposure-such as a pet in the living environment), and fungi/molds in rarer cases. Most of these allergens are not visible to the eye.

There are very effective means for controlling the symptoms of allergic rhinitis, including environmental measures to reduce exposure, and medications for treatment of symptoms. In some severe or persistent cases, immunotherapy (allergy shots) can also be helpful.

An important step in controlling symptoms is reducing exposure:

For those with chronic symptoms, see the handout on Allergy Cleanup.

For those with seasonal symptoms caused by exposure to seasonal pollen: shower you get home at the end of the day, limit the time spent outdoors, keep doors and windows closed at home and when riding in a car, and use an air purifier or air conditioner at home.

### Treatment Options

Medications for treatment of symptoms can be very effective if taken correctly:

**Nasal steroid sprays** are the most effective treatment for allergic rhinitis. These are available over the counter and include Fluticasone (Flonase or generic), mometasone (Nasonex or generic), budesonide (Rhinocort or generic), and others. It is important to know that *these take 1-2 weeks of consistent daily use before they are fully effective*, so be patient and persistent. Nasal steroids are particularly helpful for those who suffer from chronic allergic rhinitis or prolonged seasonal rhinitis. They can be used in conjunction with an antihistamine if needed.

Non-sedating **antihistamines** are also helpful in controlling symptoms, and are available over the counter. These include cetirizine (Zytrec or generic), fexofenadine (Allegra or generic) or loratadine (Claritin or generic). These start working within one hour, and can be used daily to control allergy symptoms. While they are not as effective as the nasal steroid sprays, they can be useful for the treatment of occasional allergy symptoms or if the allergy triggers are only present for a few days or a few weeks. They can also be helpful if taken in anticipation of

exposure to an allergen, such as if visiting a friend with a pet. They can be used in conjunction with the nasal steroid sprays.

Diphenhydramine (Benadryl) is not recommended for regular daytime use, as it can cause excessive drowsiness.