



ALLERGIES

Itchy runny eyes, snotty noses, that maddening cough, sore throats and rashes. What is causing it? Is it allergies? Is it a cold? Is it strep?

Allergies can cause symptoms all year round, or they can have seasonal flare-ups corresponding with the environmental allergens i.e. tree pollens and grasses (spring), weeds (summer and fall) and molds (late fall and early spring). Year-round allergies are generally caused by dust mites, animal dander and household molds.

What can we do about it?

Unfortunately, measures to **control indoor allergens** require fastidious and frequent household cleaning, which is just what working parents don't need to add to their daily load. It makes a difference though, because if there is continued exposure to the allergen, the medication will only be somewhat effective.

Indoors:

- Decreasing the dust mites in your child's bedroom and in areas of frequent play.
- Cover mattress and box spring with an airtight vinyl or nylon case that zips shut.
- Avoid carpeting, if unavoidable vacuum frequently with the child out the room.
- Damp mop and dust all surfaces weekly.
- Have washable window coverings.
- Wash bedding in water hotter than 130 F weekly.
- Keep humidity below 50%
- Keep the family pet out of your child's bedroom and you can decrease the animal allergen level by bathing or wetting the pet and brushing it down to prevent shedding.
- HEPA filters are helpful
- For molds use bleach to reduce growth in bathrooms and other damp areas.
- Don't allow smoking.

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Outdoors:

- Avoiding pollens outdoors is not easy. The pollen counts are highest in the morning between 5 am and 10 am.
- Keep bedroom windows shut use an air conditioner.
- Dry clothing and bedding indoors.
- Using the air conditioning is very advantageous.

Because pollen counts are highest between 5 am and 10 am in the morning, it may explain the early morning symptoms and cough.

Medication

Antihistamines help control the runny nose, itchy eyes and hives. Available today are wonderful new **non-sedating antihistamines** that can reduce symptoms and make your child much more comfortable. In conjunction with the use of antihistamines, there are **nasal anti-inflammatories** which can be effective in reducing nasal swelling, the infamous post nasal drip, nighttime snoring, mouth breathing and cough.

Allergy testing and injections

If symptoms are inadequately controlled by environmental control and medication, further testing should be done. The most important part of the allergist's/pediatrician's diagnostic tools is a careful and detailed history from the patient.

There are newer more accurate **blood screening panels** that can be done for environmental allergies as well as food allergies. An Allergist can do a panel of skin tests.

Skin testing or blood tests may not always reveal positive results, but that does not mean that if you are in the presence of a cat and your eyes and nose pour like a faucet, that you are not allergic to that cat. There is great hope now for allergy sufferers with the correct approach and compliance with environmental controls, medications and **immunotherapy** (allergy shots).

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