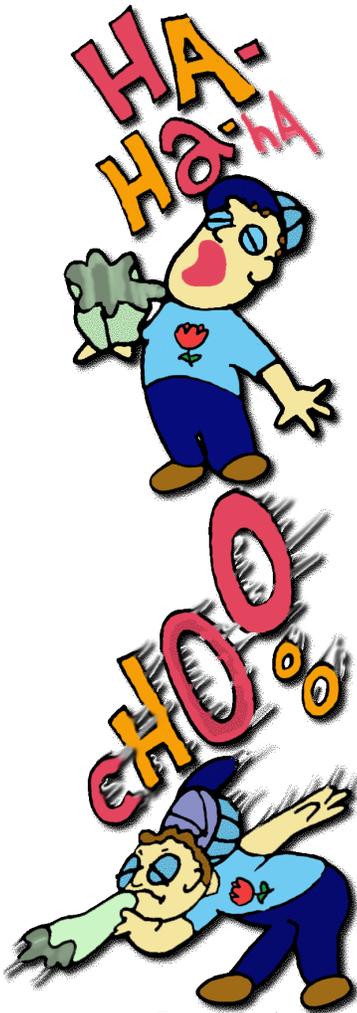


by Doug Puder, MD

APRIL BREEZES BRING MAY SNEEZES...



Although spring flowers, trees and grasses are beautiful, their pollen can cause misery for those who are allergic. *Spring allergy* is also called allergic rhinitis, allergic conjunctivitis or "hay fever". It causes runny nose, red itchy eyes, and an itchy throat. Asthmatic children may wheeze. Luckily, most allergies today can be controlled, and suffering greatly reduced.

❑ How do I know if my child has allergies?

A spring "cold that just won't go away" may well be allergy, especially if there is no fever. *Spring allergies* usually occur in more than one family member. They are rare in children under 3 years old (as it takes several seasons to develop).

❑ Can "year-round" allergens make spring allergies worse?

Yes. Chronic, year-round allergy makes children more vulnerable to spring pollens. Eliminating some of these may help: *Dust mites* grow in mattresses and bedding. Cover your child's mattress and pillow with hypoallergenic covers, avoid down or other padded comforters or pillows, and remove bedroom carpeting if possible. To prevent molds, decrease humidity (use a dehumidifier if needed). Use bleach or lysol in bathrooms and cellars. Allergy to animals can be tested, and options discussed if tests are positive. Allergies get worse if anyone smokes in your home!

❑ How can spring allergy be treated?

Start with a "non-sedating" *antihistamine*. They are given by mouth and block the release of a chemical which causes many of the allergic symptoms. They are now available without prescription:

Loratadine: *Claritin/Alavert*/generics- pills/liquids once daily

Fexofenadine: *Allegra*/generics- pills and liquid- once to twice daily

Cetirizine: *Zyrtec*/generic- pills and liquid once daily

Prescription *cortisone* nasal sprays are very helpful in reducing inflammation, and provide tremendous relief (*fluticasone, Nasonex, Veramyst, Qnasal, Rhinocort*, and others.). Avoid over-the-counter nasal sprays (*Afrin*, etc.) since they can become addicting and make things even worse when stopped.

Eye allergy responds well to allergy blocking drops such as *Zaditor* (OTC) or prescription *Pataday* (*Patanol*), or *Optivar*.

❑ What else helps?

Minimize the use of fans. HEPA air cleaning devices help a little but may not be worth the expense. If you have airconditioning, keep windows closed during high pollen count days.

❑ Should We See an Allergist?

Most children can tolerate the pollen season with these treatments. A child who is still miserable despite all we have discussed should be tested by an allergist, and may benefit from "allergy shots" (immunotherapy).

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