

Allergic Rhinitis

Allergic rhinitis is the medical term given to an allergic reaction in the nose. Allergic rhinitis is also known as “hay fever”. The typical symptoms of allergic rhinitis are the following: nasal congestion with a clear or watery nasal discharge; bouts of sneezing; itching of the nose, throat or roof of the mouth; postnasal drainage; fatigue; general weakness and in some cases associated sinus problems. In many individuals with allergic rhinitis there are also associated symptoms of the eyes, with tearing, itching, redness and swelling.

Some sufferers also experience ear symptoms associated with abnormal function of the Eustachian tube which connects the back of the throat to the ears. This may cause problems with hearing, plugging and a popping sensation in the ear or itching and pain.

There are two kinds of allergic rhinitis. Seasonal (generally due to pollens) and perennial (due to allergens present year round, such as animal dander, dust and molds). There are forms of rhinitis where no positive allergy tests can be demonstrated. In some of these cases, however, allergy cells can be found in the nose. These individuals often suffer from the same symptoms that patients with allergic rhinitis experience, with the most prominent symptom being nasal congestion. This rhinitis is also frequently associated with sinus infections.

There are three steps in the treatment of allergic rhinitis. The first step is to avoid the things you are allergic to, but in many cases this is not practical. The second step is the introduction of antihistamines. These are available over the counter as well as by prescription and are very effective. Occasionally some patients may experience sedation, which may limit its use. They are taken today to prevent tomorrow's symptoms. Therefore, it is best to start them prior to your allergy season and to continue their use throughout your season. This will increase their effectiveness in preventing symptoms. Immunotherapy (allergy injections) is the third step. They help to build up a patient's tolerance to what he/she is allergic to, therefore providing a more permanent relief of symptoms.

There are several types of treatments which should be avoided:

- a. Over-the-counter nasal sprays, which can cause permanent damage if they are used continuously for long periods of time (more than one week).
- b. The single seasonal “allergy shot”, which is a steroid. There are serious concerns about the side effects that this administration may cause.
- c. Allergy drops under the tongue; special diets and vitamins have not been proven to be effective in the treatment of allergic rhinitis and therefore should be avoided.