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Antihistamines

Histamine is the substance stored in the body's allergy cells that when released causes all the classical allergy symptoms of sneezing, nasal discharge, itching, watery eyes, etc.

Antihistamines are drugs that block the action of histamine in the different organs in the body (nose, lungs, skin, etc.).

For antihistamines to be effective they need to be started prior to the allergy season then used on a continuous basis. When this is not possible they should then be started as soon as the first allergy symptoms develop and be continued until the symptoms have totally disappeared for two to three days. Antihistamines are less effective when they are taken after the allergy symptoms have started. They are usually very effective in controlling all the allergy symptoms except for nasal obstruction. For that reason they are often used in conjunction with decongestants.

The most common side effects of antihistamines is sedation. Because of this side effect it is recommended not to drive while you are under the effects of antihistamines. Irritability, dryness of the mouth and difficulty with urination are less frequent side effects associated with antihistamines.

There are essentially no contraindications to the use of antihistamines, however they are not currently recommended to use during pregnancy.