

UAB Health Education

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES

ALLERGIC RHINITIS (ALLERGIES)



Allergic rhinitis is a common reaction in which the immune system over-responds to something in the environment, called an allergen. If you have allergies, your body releases chemicals such as histamine in response to allergens. The release of histamine causes cold-like symptoms. Common allergens include plant pollens, mold, dust mites and animal dander. Seasonal allergies occur most commonly in late spring, summer and fall. This condition is often referred to as hay fever (although you do not have a fever with this condition). Perennial allergies can result in symptoms year-round.

DIAGNOSIS

Your provider will ask you about your symptoms, perform a physical exam and may recommend one of the following tests to determine what exactly you are allergic to:

- **Allergy skin test:** In this test tiny amounts of common allergens are pricked into the skin of your arm or back and your provider observes the way your skin reacts to each allergen.
- **Allergy blood test:** A blood sample is measured for your immune system's response to a specific allergen.

TREATMENT

- **Nasal Corticosteroids** treat nasal inflammation, itching, and runny nose. Examples include fluticasone (Flonase), budesonide (Rhinocort Allergy) and triamcinolone (Nasacort Allergy 24 Hour).
- **Antihistamines** such as loratidine (Claritin, Alavert), cetirizine (Zyrtec Allergy) and fexofenadine (Allegra Allergy) help reduce sneezing, runny nose and itchiness. Antihistamine eye drops such as ketotifen fumarate (Alaway) can reduce eye irritation and itchiness.
- **Decongestants:** Pseudoephedrine (Sudafed), Phenylephrine
- **Nasal Saline Irrigation (Neti Pot)** flushes out your sinuses and can provide symptomatic relief.
- **Cromolyn Sodium** prevents the release of histamine and is available as a nasal spray or as an eye drop.
- **Leukotriene Inhibitors** such as Montelukast (Singulair) are especially useful in allergen-induced asthma.

PREVENTION

- Limit exposure to known allergens.
- Avoid outdoor activities in the morning when pollen counts are highest, stay indoors on dry and windy days
- Close windows and doors during pollen season, use air conditioning, wear a dust mask when cleaning house or gardening, vacuum carpet regularly and consider using indoor air

RESOURCES

FamilyDoctor.org <https://familydoctor.org/condition/allergic-rhinitis/>

Mayo Clinic <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/hay-fever/symptoms-causes/syc-20373039>

SYMPTOMS

- Sneezing/coughing
- Itching around eyes, nose, mouth, throat, skin
- Watery, red or swollen eyes
- Dark circles under eyes
- Nasal discharge/congestion (discharge is thin, watery, and clear, compared to an upper respiratory infection or influenza)
- Hives
- Pressure in nose and cheeks
- Ear fullness, popping

RISK FACTORS

- Having other allergies, asthma or atopic dermatitis (eczema)
- Having a family member with allergies or asthma
- Living or working in an environment that constantly exposes you to allergens such as animal dander or dust mites