

Still sneezing? Find relief from allergies

Many times, sniffles, coughs, congestion and watery eyes are just symptoms of a nagging cold. But if these symptoms do not ease up after a week or two, you may have allergies.

Allergies happen when the body becomes too sensitive to things such as grass, mold, smoke, pet dander, dust or cockroaches.

Medicines to curb symptoms

Many helpful allergy medicines are available over the counter. Antihistamines can help relieve sneezing, runny nose and itchiness in the nose, throat and eyes. Some can cause drowsiness. Decongestants can help a stuffy nose. If you choose a decongestant spray instead of a pill, do not use it for more than three days in a row. Extended use can make stuffiness worse. Talk with your health care provider about other nasal sprays that may be safe to take all the time.

The best move: prevention

Avoiding allergy triggers may be the smartest move of all.

- Is dust your enemy? Use special mattress and pillow covers designed to keep out dust mites, which are tiny bugs that can trigger allergies. Wash bedding weekly in hot water.
- Vacuum weekly to remove dust, pet dander and tiny bits of mold. Pick a vacuum that has a high-energy particulate absorption (HEPA) filter or double-layered bags to contain the allergy triggers. Adding a HEPA filter to the furnace or using a room air purifier with such a filter also helps remove these items from the indoor air.
- If pet dander is a trigger, ask another family member to bathe the pet weekly. Be sure to wash your hands after touching your pet.
- Make your home a smoke-free zone.
- Avoid spending time outdoors before 10 a.m., when the outside air is thick with pollen.

To wipe out mold and dust mites, keep the humidity in your house below 50 percent. Running the air-conditioning or using a dehumidifier can help.

