


# allergy



Answers  
at *Walgreens*™

A smiling woman with dark hair, wearing a purple lab coat and a gold chain necklace, stands in a Walgreens pharmacy. She is holding a small black object in her hands. In the background, there are shelves stocked with various bottles of medicine. The Walgreens logo is visible in the upper left corner of the image.

# Walgreens

## Answers about allergies begin here.

If you have an allergy, you're not alone. An estimated 50 million Americans have some kind of allergy to indoor or outdoor environmental factors, such as food, medication, latex, pollen, pets or an insect.<sup>1</sup> This booklet will help you learn more about your allergy, including how to recognize symptoms, how to avoid allergy triggers and what steps to take to relieve your symptoms.



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## What causes allergies?

Allergies are the body's reaction to outside substances, called allergens, that are otherwise harmless. But when a person with allergies is faced with certain allergens in the air such as pollen, dust, animal dander and mold, the body reacts by making chemicals that can cause allergy symptoms. Food, insect bites, medications, plants and latex can also cause allergic reactions.<sup>2</sup>

## Who develops allergies?

People with a family history of allergies are more likely to develop allergies. If you have allergies, it's likely your children will, too. Those who live or work in environments with many allergens are also more likely to develop allergies.<sup>3</sup>

## What are year-round allergies?

Year-round allergies, or perennial allergic rhinitis, may be due to indoor allergens from pets, mold, dust mites and cockroach droppings.



## What is hay fever?

Seasonal allergies, sometimes called “hay fever” or seasonal allergic rhinitis, occur mainly in the spring and fall and can be caused by allergens such as tree, grass and weed pollen.

When you are outside, pay attention to pollen and mold counts. Stay inside when counts are at their highest.

Avoid mowing grass or doing other yard work on those days. If you must be outside, use a face mask to avoid inhaling allergens and shower after spending time outside. This can help wash away allergens that collect on your skin and hair.<sup>4,5</sup> For the daily pollen count in your area, go to the National Allergy Bureau’s website [www.aaaai.org/nab](http://www.aaaai.org/nab).



## What are common symptoms of an allergy?

Allergy symptoms can be mild or severe and include:

- Breathing problems, coughing, sneezing or a runny nose
- Burning, watering, itchy or swollen eyes
- Itchy skin, hives or rashes
- Abdominal pain, cramps, vomiting or diarrhea<sup>6</sup>

## How do I know if I have an allergy?

The way to find out if you have an allergy is by talking with your healthcare provider about your symptoms. Your healthcare provider can use that information along with medical test results to find out if you have an allergy. Once you know what type of allergy you have, your doctor can advise you on the best way to prevent and treat it in the short and long term. Remember, the best way to deal with an allergy is to first consult your healthcare provider for



a correct diagnosis.<sup>7</sup> Your pharmacist can also help you make product choices to treat allergy symptoms. The chart on the next page is a general guide to what your symptoms may mean and actions to take.

# Allergy Guide

symptoms	possible cause	
Runny nose, itchy eyes and sneezing during spring and fall.	Seasonal allergic rhinitis, known as hay fever, caused by an allergy to certain pollens in the air.	
Year-round runny nose, itchy eyes and sneezing.	Year-round rhinitis, also known as hay fever, usually caused by indoor allergens from pets, mold or dust mites.	
A medication you used caused a rash or another unusual reaction.	A drug allergy or drug side effect.	
An allergic skin reaction from exposure to certain plants, such as poison ivy.	Contact dermatitis, an inflammation of the skin caused by direct contact with a chemical in these plants called urushiol.	
A reaction to a certain food or foods.	Food allergies. The most common are caused by milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, soy and wheat.	



## action to take

Try to avoid exposure to pollens or other triggers and use anti-allergy products to reduce your symptoms.<sup>8</sup>

Try to avoid exposure to indoor allergens and use anti-allergy products.<sup>9</sup>

Report the drug allergy or side effect to your healthcare provider and Walgreens pharmacist. Make sure to mention it when a new medication is prescribed.<sup>10</sup>

Rinse the area right away with lukewarm water. Take cool showers, apply calamine lotion and talk to your Walgreens pharmacist about over the counter products that can help relieve your skin inflammation.<sup>11</sup>

Avoid the foods that are causing your allergic reaction. Also, people who have a severe allergy to chicken or eggs should talk to their healthcare provider about whether or not to get a flu shot.<sup>12,13</sup>



## How can I reduce the allergens in my home?

- Dust, vacuum and wash bedding often. Target furniture, curtains, children's stuffed toys and other dust collectors in your cleaning routine.
- Use clean filters in your vacuum, heating and air conditioning units. Some air cleaning devices used in the home have high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters to remove particles in the air. These filters can remove several types of allergens.
- Change furnace filters regularly.



- Minimize moisture in the kitchen and bathroom to reduce mold formation.
- Close windows and doors when pollen counts are high.
- House plants can contribute to indoor pollen and mold. Try to limit the amount in your home.
- Choose polyester-filled comforters and pillows instead of down or feather.<sup>14,15</sup>

# colds and allergies



## How are colds and allergies the same? How are they different?

**Symptoms:** Sometimes the symptoms of a cold and an airborne allergy are similar.

**Cause:** A cold is caused by a virus. An allergy is caused by an immune reaction to allergens.

**Contagiousness:** Colds are contagious; allergies are not.

**Timing:** Colds tend to occur once in a while and last for a week or two. Allergies can be seasonal, year-round, or occur only on rare occasions if there is an exposure to the allergen.<sup>16</sup>

## Is it a cold or an allergy?<sup>16</sup>

symptoms	cold	allergy
Cough	Common	Sometimes
General aches, pain	Slight	Never
Fatigue, weakness	Sometimes	Sometimes
Itchy eyes	Rare or never	Common
Sneezing	Usual	Usual
Sore throat	Common	Sometimes
Runny nose	Common	Common
Stuffy nose	Common	Common
Fever	Rare	Never
Duration	3-14 days	Weeks



# allergy medications



## What medications help to relieve allergy symptoms?

Many kinds of medications can help control allergy symptoms. Some require a prescription. Others are available over-the-counter. Always ask your doctor or pharmacist which medication is right for you.

### Antihistamines

The body can react to an allergen by producing substances called histamines, which can cause a runny nose, sneezing, scratchy throat and itchy, watery eyes. Antihistamines work to lessen these symptoms by blocking the histamines in the body.<sup>17</sup>



## Topical allergy medications

Red, itchy skin irritations and rashes can occur after contact with plants, animals, insect bites, certain soaps, cosmetics and other allergens. Antihistamine creams and ointments such as diphenhydramine help to reduce itching. Corticosteroid creams and ointments such as hydrocortisone can also reduce itching and inflammation.<sup>18,19</sup>





## What is pseudoephedrine?

Pseudoephedrine is a safe, effective and widely used over-the-counter and prescription medication. It provides temporary relief of nasal, sinus and ear tube congestion. It has been used for decades and is found in many single and combination-ingredient products.<sup>20</sup>

## Where can I find pseudoephedrine products?

There are laws for the safe use of pseudoephedrine that require it to be stored in a secure location in the pharmacy—behind the counter. Because of these laws you will have to ask your Walgreens pharmacist for the pseudoephedrine product you want to use.

You may also want to consider another decongestant product that is similar to pseudoephedrine but that does not have these restrictions—phenylephrine. It is found in many over-the-counter and prescription cold, cough and allergy products.<sup>21</sup>



## Medications that relieve allergy symptoms<sup>20-25</sup>

Ingredient		Product name	
Antihistamine Based Drug			
Cetirizine		Zyrtec/Wal-Zyr™	
Fexofenadine		Allegra/Wal-Fex®	
Loratadine		Claritin/Wal-Itin®	
Diphenhydramine		Benadryl/Wal-Dryl®	
Decongestant Based Drug			
Phenylephrine		Sudafed PE & Wal-phed PE	
Pseudoephedrine		Sudafed D & Wal-phed D	





## **Do allergy medications have side effects?**

Some allergy medications have side effects. Antihistamines can cause drowsiness and dry mouth. Decongestants might cause a jittery or nervous feeling, a rapid heartbeat, a rise in blood pressure or effects that make it hard to sleep.

## **Is there a way to limit side effects?**

To choose the right product, read labels carefully and if you have other medical conditions, check with your healthcare provider and pharmacist to see which products you can use. You may be able to limit some side effects by choosing certain products, such as non-drowsy antihistamines or an over-the-counter glycerin mouth rinse to help ease dry mouth.<sup>26,27</sup> However, even non-drowsy antihistamines may cause some drowsiness in certain people.



## be *i*nformed

### Take caution with allergies

For some people, allergies aren't just a matter of itching and sniffing. Allergies can cause or complicate things like sinus problems, eczema or asthma. Some people have life-threatening allergic reactions called anaphylaxis. This is more common with allergies to foods, insect stings, medications and latex. Anaphylaxis requires immediate medical attention. This includes an epinephrine shot, calling 911 and a trip to the emergency room. If you or your child is at risk for serious allergic reactions, talk to your doctor about carrying a self-administered medication called an EpiPen<sup>®</sup> or EpiPen Jr<sup>®</sup> in case of emergency. Make sure you know how to use it properly.<sup>28</sup>

# nonmedical options



## What are some nonmedical ways to help treat my allergy symptoms?

- A humidifier can help ease cold and allergy symptoms, such as dry sinuses, congestion and cracked lips, by increasing moisture levels in the air (humidity). Some give off a cool mist, while others, called vaporizers, create hot steam that cools before it leaves the machine. Steam (either from the shower or from putting a towel over your head and breathing in over a bowl of hot water) can also help reduce congestion.<sup>29,30</sup>

- A nasal saline irrigation can help reduce congestion and facial pain. This is a treatment that uses salt and water to flush out nasal passages. A popular choice is called the Neti pot. Nasal strips may also help you breathe easier.<sup>31</sup>
- Herbal and dietary supplements can strengthen your resistance against allergens. However, don't take herbal remedies for allergies along with any allergy medication without first talking to your healthcare provider or pharmacist.<sup>32</sup>
- Cough drops can help you cut down on coughing. Throat lozenges or drinking hot drinks like ginger tea, hot apple cider and hot tea with honey and lemon can soothe a scratchy throat.<sup>33</sup>



# children's allergies



## How can I treat my child's allergy symptoms?

In most cases, avoiding allergens and using over-the-counter products can bring relief. Ask your child's doctor which allergy medications or treatments are best for him or her. Always read the label to make sure a product is appropriate for your child's age.<sup>34</sup>

## Are allergy medicines OK to use in children?

As with all medications, follow directions carefully and do not give more than directed. Antihistamines may make your child drowsy at school and may make it hard for him or her to learn. Even non-drowsy antihistamines may cause some people to become drowsy. Do not give adult antihistamine products to children. Some children react to antihistamines with unusual excited behavior. If this occurs, stop use and consult your child's doctor. When in doubt, consult your pediatrician or Walgreens pharmacist for product recommendations, instructions for use and how to watch for potential side effects.<sup>35</sup>



# nasal allergies



## What are nasal allergies?

Nasal allergies are a symptom of seasonal or year-round allergic rhinitis. When an allergen enters your nose, your body reacts by producing and releasing chemicals that can cause sneezing, and a runny, itchy or stuffed nose (caused by swelling of the nose tissue).<sup>36</sup>





## What are the different options for treating nasal allergies?

- **Antihistamines** are the most common type of medication for relief of mild allergies. They can make you stop sneezing, and stop your nose from running when your allergies are acting up. However, antihistamines cannot fight every symptom. If you have congestion, you might want to try a decongestant.<sup>37</sup>
- **Decongestants** help to shrink blood vessels and tissues in the nose that have become swollen because of allergies. Decongestants can help a stuffed nose, but they don't help relieve sneezing or itching. Decongestants are available in nose sprays and tablets.<sup>38</sup>
- **24 hour nasal allergy sprays** are the medication of choice for people with moderate to severe allergies. Sprays treat inflammation and help relieve nasal allergy symptoms, including congestion.<sup>39</sup>

# allergies and itchy eyes



## How common are eye allergies?

Up to 40 percent of Americans get eye allergies. Some people just get eye allergies during “allergy season.” Others have chronic eye allergies and have symptoms year round.<sup>40,41</sup>

## Why do allergies make my eyes itch?

Eye allergies happen when the eye reacts to an allergy trigger, called an allergen. The eye makes a substance called histamine to fight off the allergen and this can cause inflammation of the eye. Common allergens include pet dander, dust, smoke, perfumes or even foods. Other outdoor allergens include ragweed, pollens, dust or mold spores.<sup>42</sup>

## What are the symptoms of eye allergies?

Eye allergy symptoms include red eyes, “bloodshot” looking eyes, itching and burning eyes, puffy eyelids and eye discharge.<sup>43</sup> Long-term contact with allergens can cause more severe burning and itching and even a painful reaction to light.<sup>42</sup>

## What can I do to prevent eye allergies?

The best thing you can do to prevent allergies is to avoid or limit contact with the allergens that cause them. If your eye allergies don't go away, an allergist can perform tests to help find the allergens that trigger your symptoms.<sup>42</sup>

## What products can help treat eye allergies?

- Artificial tear drops and sterile saline eye rinse products flush allergens from the eye for short-term relief.
- Antihistamine eye drops have an anti-itch effect. Some eye drops have only antihistamines, others have a combination of antihistamines and decongestants.
- If these products don't relieve your symptoms you can try an oral antihistamine. But that may result in side effects, such as drowsiness and dry mouth.

If they don't work for you or if your symptoms persist or worsen, speak with your healthcare provider.<sup>44-46</sup>



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## Questions about which products are right for your allergies?

Walgreens pharmacists can help you determine the best products for your individual needs. Consult with one of our knowledgeable pharmacists in store or log on to **Walgreens.com/PharmacyChat** to chat with a live pharmacist anytime, day or night.

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