



# AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ALLERGY ASTHMA & IMMUNOLOGY

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## Patients & Consumers

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## Tips to Remember: Outdoor Allergens

Seasonal allergic rhinitis, or "hay fever," affects more than 35 million Americans. If you suffer from it, you may experience sneezing, stuffiness, a runny nose and itchiness in your nose, the roof of your mouth, throat, eyes or ears. These allergic reactions are most commonly caused by pollen and mold spores in the air, which start a chain reaction in your immune system.

Your immune system controls how your body defends itself. For instance, if you have an allergy to pollen, the immune system identifies pollen as an invader or *allergen*. Your immune system overreacts by producing antibodies called *Immunoglobulin E (IgE)*. These antibodies travel to cells that release chemicals, causing an allergic reaction.

### Pollen

Pollen are tiny cells needed to fertilize plants. Pollen from plants with colorful flowers, like roses, usually do not cause allergies. These plants rely on insects to transport the pollen for fertilization. On the other hand, many plants have flowers which produce light, dry pollen that are easily spread by wind. These culprits cause allergy symptoms.

Each plant has a period of pollination that does not vary much from year to year. However, the weather can affect the amount of pollen in the air at any time. The pollinating season starts later in the spring the further north one goes. Generally, the entire pollen season lasts from February or March through October. In warmer places, pollination can be year-round.

Seasonal allergic rhinitis is often caused by tree pollen in the early spring. During the late spring and early summer, grasses often cause symptoms. Late summer and fall hay fever is caused by weeds.



**Molds**

Molds are tiny fungi related to mushrooms but without stems, roots or leaves. Their spores float in the air like pollen. Outdoor mold spores begin to increase as temperatures rise in the spring and reach their peak in July in warmer states and October in the colder states. They can be found year-round in the South and on the West Coast.

Molds can be found almost anywhere, including soil, plants and rotting wood.

**Pollen and Mold Levels**

Pollen and mold counts measure the amount of allergens present in the air.

The National Allergy Bureau™ (NAB™) is the nation's only pollen and mold counting network certified by the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI). As a free service to the public, the NAB compiles pollen and mold levels from certified stations across the nation. You can find these levels on the NAB page of the AAAAI's Web site at [www.aaaai.org/nab](http://www.aaaai.org/nab).

**Effects of Weather and Location**

The relationship between pollen and mold levels and your symptoms can be complex. Your symptoms may be affected by recent contact with other allergens, the amount of pollen exposure and your sensitivity to pollen and mold.

Allergy symptoms are often less prominent on rainy, cloudy or windless days because pollen does not move around during these conditions. Pollen tends to travel more with hot, dry and windy weather, which can increase your allergy symptoms.

Some people think that moving to another area of the country may help to lessen their symptoms. However, many pollen (especially grasses) and molds are common to most plant zones in the United States, so moving to escape your allergies is not recommended. Also, because your allergy problem begins in your genes, you are likely to find new allergens to react to in new environments.

**Treatment**

Finding the right treatment is the best method for managing your allergies. If your seasonal allergy symptoms are making you miserable, an allergist/immunologist, often referred to as an allergist, can help. Your allergist has the background and experience to test which pollen or molds are causing your symptoms and prescribe a treatment plan to help you feel better. This plan may include avoiding outdoor exposure, along with

medications.

If your symptoms continue or if you have them for many months of the year, your allergist may recommend allergy shots, or immunotherapy. This involves receiving regular injections, which help your immune system become more and more resistant to the specific allergen and lessen your symptoms as well as the need for medications.

There are also simple steps you can take to limit your exposure to the pollen or molds that cause your symptoms.

Keep your windows closed at night and if possible, use air conditioning, which cleans, cools and dries the air.

Try to stay indoors when the pollen or mold levels are reported to be high. Wear a pollen mask if long periods of exposure are unavoidable.

Don't mow lawns or rake leaves because it stirs up pollen and molds. Also avoid hanging sheets or clothes outside to dry.

Consider taking a vacation during the height of the pollen season to a more pollen-free area, such as the beach or sea. When traveling by car, keep your windows closed.

Most important, be sure to take any medications prescribed by your allergist regularly, in the recommended dosage.

### **Healthy Tips**

- Seasonal allergic rhinitis or "hay fever," causes sneezing, stuffiness, a runny nose and itchiness in your nose, the roof of your mouth, throat, eyes or ears.
- Pollen and mold in the air commonly cause these symptoms.
- Treatment from an allergist is the best method for coping with your allergies. This could include medications, limiting exposure or even allergy shots.
- Monitor pollen and mold levels from the National Allergy Bureau at [www.aaaai.org/nab](http://www.aaaai.org/nab).

### **Feel Better. Live Better.**

An allergist/immunologist, often referred to as an allergist, is a pediatrician or internist with at least two additional years of specialized training in the diagnosis and treatment of problems such as allergies, asthma, autoimmune diseases and the evaluation and treatment of patients with recurrent infections, such as immunodeficiency diseases.

The right care can make the difference between suffering with an allergic disease and feeling better. By visiting the office of an allergist, you can expect an accurate diagnosis, a treatment plan that works and educational information to help you manage your disease.

Find an allergist near you at:

[www.aaaai.org/physref](http://www.aaaai.org/physref)

The contents of this brochure are for informational purposes only. It is not intended to replace evaluation by a physician. If you have questions or medical concerns, please contact your allergist/immunologist.

#### **A Trusted Resource**

The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI) represents allergists, asthma specialists, clinical immunologists, allied health professionals and others with a special interest in the research and treatment of allergic disease.

#### **Ordering Information**

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