



# CONTROLLING SEASONAL ALLERGY

By Robert Torrano, M.D.

Ah – the beautiful blossoms and rolling green hills of spring. Ah-choo! and the misery of seasonal nasal allergy. About 1 in 5 people suffer with nasal allergy, and the sneeze, itch, and drip of seasonal pollen allergy (also called hay fever) can ruin this beautiful season. What can be done to control seasonal allergy?

Hay fever symptoms begin when you breathe pollen particles into your nose, setting off an unneeded immune response. If you can keep pollen from entering the nose, you can prevent allergy. This is difficult in northern California where the mild climate allows the pollen season to stretch from late January to October.

Common sense pollen avoidance ideas include sleeping and driving with the windows closed, and using air-conditioning to filter the air. Consider a mask for heavy garden work, and bathing after high pollen exposure like outdoor sports. Keep pollen covered dirty clothes out of the bedroom and don't dry clothes outdoors. Be careful on hot, windy days in April and May when the highest pollen counts occur. A trip to the beach can also bring relief. However, you can't live in a bubble or always wear a mask, and some pollen exposure is inevitable.

Since you can't completely avoid pollen, allergy medicine can help control symptoms. Antihistamines, or histamine blockers, are often tried first. They relieve itch, sneeze, and watery drip, but do little for congestion or sinus pressure. Antihistamines are available in pill form and as a nasal spray, and they work better if taken before pollen exposure. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about non-sedating antihistamines to avoid impaired school, work, or driving performance. Decongestants help with congestion and sinus pressures, and are often taken with antihistamine. When antihistamine/decongestant medications don't provide enough relief, your doctor will often prescribe medication to treat inflammation in the nose, usually nasal steroid sprays. Nasal steroid sprays are very safe, rarely cause side effects, and are very effective, although they may take a few days to work. There are other anti-inflammation medications you can consider with your doctor.

When pollen avoidance and allergy medications don't provide enough relief, immunotherapy, or allergy shots may be needed. Immunotherapy works by stopping the immune response that causes allergy. Because of the long pollen season in our community, immunotherapy can be very helpful for severe allergy symptoms.

With common sense pollen avoidance, allergy medication, and immunotherapy, almost everyone can get out and enjoy the beautiful northern California spring.

For more information regarding allergies and asthma, contact **Marie Thompson**, at Allergy & Asthma Associates of Northern California (408) 243-2700 (ext. 237)  
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