

Script – Print – Late to the party when it comes to allergies

If you grew up without suffering from seasonal allergies, consider yourself one of the lucky ones.

But if you've reached your 40s or 50s and are now feeling miserable during the spring and fall months, welcome to the club. Adult-onset allergies are a real thing. And it happens to a lot of people.

Nearly 1 in 3 adults in the U.S. have seasonal allergies, eczema, or food allergies, according to recent data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Nearly 75% of those are older than 45. Many of those people developed allergies in adulthood or were not diagnosed until they were adults.

Experts are unclear why or how allergies develop in adulthood. Some theories include moving from one geographic region to another, having a reduced immune system or owning a pet for the first time in your life. There is a belief, however, that having one severe allergic reaction or symptoms during childhood can increase your chances of developing allergies as an adult.

Many people who develop allergy symptoms early in life will outgrow their allergies by their 20s or 30s. But, really, it's possible to develop an allergy to something – whether it's an animal or pollen – at any point in life.

"People will have them as kids and sometimes grow out of it," says Breanne Gendron, a nurse practitioner with OSF HealthCare. "Then the alternative happens, where something starts bothering you as you age. That's when we teach you about all the different medications you can use to control your symptoms."

Gendron says most people are bothered by things that bloom and that includes trees and grass in the spring. Ragweed pollen or other weed pollen are problematic in the fall. Spores from molds and fungi are typically around in warm-weather months. And don't forget about house dust mite allergens, which tend to be present throughout the year.

Most allergy symptoms, while annoying, are mild. Examples are sneezing, itchy eyes and runny nose. In her practice, Gendron notices more adults suffering from sinus infections with their allergy issues, more so than her younger patients.

"The dilemma about having untreated allergies is that you can get extra congestion in your sinuses, which could lead to a sinus infection," Gendron says. "When you get pressure in your face, and you generally feel a little rundown, then we want to treat you for that."

Gendron recommends treating allergies with a combination of oral antihistamines, eye drops and steroid nasal sprays. Allergy shots may be in order as well. But first, talk to your doctor to see if you are a candidate for a skin test to determine your specific allergies. "Once the medication gets your symptoms to calm down, you can generally keep it in check with less medication," she says.

There are other things you can do to help minimize your symptoms. Gendron recommends things like eliminating carpet in your bedroom and washing your sheets regularly to eliminate dust. Consider taking a shower before bedtime, especially after being outside, and keep the windows closed at night to prevent pollen from entering the home.

This fall, protect yourself from those triggers that you know will make you uncomfortable. "If you are bothered by something in the environment and you know that it bothers you, such as mowing the grass or raking leaves, do yourself a favor by wearing a mask to prevent yourself from breathing in more allergens," she adds. "And take your allergy pills before you do those things, to make sure that you're going to have less of a reaction."

For more information, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).