

The 411 on Seasonal Allergies

Every year, millions of Americans who live in regions that experience harsh winters count down the weeks until warmer weather returns. For many of these people, warmer weather also means spring allergies – especially in the Midwest, where pollen is the main culprit. According to the American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology (ACAAI), spring allergies typically begin in February and last until early summer, with tree pollination starting earliest in the year followed by grass pollination later in the spring and summer.

Dr. Shitaldas Pamnani, an OSF HealthCare internal medicine physician, says identifying whether your symptoms are, in fact, caused by spring allergies is an important step in order to best treat your symptoms.

Common symptoms of seasonal allergies include congestion, sneezing, eye irritation, cough, wheezing, and headaches. However, allergy symptoms can sometimes be tricky to identify. For example, Dr. Pamnani says that while irritated eyes can be an indicator of spring allergies, the type of irritation can help determine the cause.

Shitaldas Pamnani, M.D., PhD, Internal Medicine Physician, OSF HealthCare

“Dry eye and dry throat may not be allergy symptoms. It’s more the other way around – the throat feeling more irritated and itchy, runny eyes or feeling like there is dirt in the eye. These can sometimes be allergies because sometimes the pollen triggers that and it leads to more runny eyes or watering of the eye rather than dry eyes.” (:20)

The ACAAI says over-the-counter (OTC) eye drops can provide some relief for irritated eyes in the short term, but warns that prolonged use of some OTC eye drops may actually cause your condition to worsen. Your doctor can help determine the best course of action if eye irritation is one of the main allergy symptoms you experience.

Another symptom that Dr. Pamnani sees but is not quite as common is vertigo.

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“Lately what I’ve been seeing is vertigo that can be triggered – or BPPV (benign paroxysmal positional vertigo). Sometimes it can be triggered because of the sinus congestion. It can lead to Eustachian tube dysfunction, which is one of the things that I’ve been noticing.” (:14)

In order to avoid severe sinus congestion that may lead to vertigo, Dr. Pamnani typically recommends using Flonase and neti pots as soon as you start experiencing spring allergies, before your symptoms worsen. When used early and properly, these can help tremendously. He adds, however, that deviated septums and nasal polyps can make allergy symptoms worse and you may require additional measures to help alleviate symptoms if you have either of these. He recommends talking to your doctor to help you determine the best course of action.

For some people, seasonal allergies have never been an issue. But Dr. Pamnani says it is definitely possible to develop these allergies later in life – and adds that people can experience seasonal allergies in both rural and urban areas.

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“Sometimes, it’s associated with migration – when you move from one area to another area. Allergies are triggered because of the protein particles in pollens and whatnot. Some people do get desensitized to these protein particles and later in life they might have reduced allergies. But if they move to a new area, it takes a couple of years of getting exposed to new particles and developing an immune response, and they may start having allergy symptoms in that area.” (:26)

If you have never experienced seasonal allergies but are suddenly having symptoms such as sneezing, watery eyes, and so on, you may have developed allergies. And if you have tried everything under the sun to combat your seasonal allergies and are still experiencing symptoms, Dr. Pamnani recommends making an appointment with your doctor.

While antibiotics are not typically utilized to help with seasonal allergies, Dr. Pamnani says they may be beneficial only if you have signs of infection – which your doctor can determine. Additionally, further testing can be done to help create a more personalized plan that is tailored to you.

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“Persistent symptoms for more than three to four weeks, having mucopurulent which is basically yellow to green discharge, fever, headache, sinus pain or face pain, ear pain, vertigo symptoms – those symptoms are the most common reasons you should see a doctor.” (:18)

The good news for spring allergy sufferers is that many weather channels and phone apps can now track the daily pollen count, so you can check that in the morning to help you prepare before heading out the door.

If you are unable to relieve your spring allergy symptoms on your own, if your symptoms are severe, or if you are unsure if your symptoms are caused by seasonal allergies, make an appointment with your primary care provider.

If you do not have a primary care provider, [find one today](#).