

Breathe the fresh air this fall

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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In the Midwest, you never know when the hot weather is truly gone for good. But as we leap into fall and cooler temperatures become more consistent, it's important to prioritize our immune health.

To those without severe breathing disorders, the cool fall breeze can be welcome. But for those with chronic lung diseases, it can be a challenging time.

“Especially people with asthma or patients with emphysema or COPD, we notice some of their symptoms may come to the forefront with this change in weather” says Juanbosco Ayala, MD, a pulmonologist physician with OSF HealthCare. “Things such as cough, shortness of breath and wheezing are common symptoms that may unfold during this timeframe.”

With kids going back to school, fall sports in full swing, and viruses present in the workplace, fresh air can mean increased sickness.

Dr. Ayala says there are a few ways we can protect ourselves this fall.

“Having the flu vaccine is definitely a great way to protect ourselves. Also, recognize how your breathing is changing. Ask yourself if it is related to the temperatures changing, or if it's a persistent cough that's not going away. An increase in the sputum you make every day, as well as fevers, chills or night sweats can be cause for concern,” Dr. Ayala says.

While springtime allergies are more common and severe, Dr. Ayala says allergies can still persist into the fall months.

“We don't see it as bad as the spring, but it's still present. The bump you see in the spring is related to patients going outside a little more, or things changing in the springtime.”

The change in fall weather can also impact the way we sleep. As temperatures drop, the number of people sleeping with their windows for a little fresh air increases.

“As far as patients with chronic sleep disorders, sleeping with the windows open is not an issue. They can definitely do that. The big thing is to continue their therapies, like wearing their CPAP every night as long as they can,” Dr. Ayala adds.

If cold-like symptoms persist, Dr. Ayala says it's important to see your doctor right away. If there are concerns of a breathing or sleeping disorder, you may be referred to a pulmonologist or sleep doctor for further evaluation.