

Spring Allergy Season Could Extend Into Summer But New Treatments Ease Suffering

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The late rains of spring may have helped reduce the drought threat in northern California, but they could also cause pollen counts to rise and persist into summer. For allergy sufferers, that can mean more itchy eyes and congested noses in June, July and August.

Initially, rains and wet weather clear the air of pollens that emerge in spring when plants and grasses bloom, feed, and pollinate. Those same rains, however, stimulate more pollen-producing plant growth, and consequently allergy symptoms that may have been dormant in spring can erupt in summer, creating nature's own version of "pay now or pay later."

While research continues on the external forces that trigger allergies, the medical community has long recognized the internal factor that makes some people more prone to this condition than others: genetics. When pollen is inhaled into the nose, it creates an immune system reaction, and that immunological response is genetically determined.

An allergic person's immune system responds to pollens or other environmental irritants as though they are foreign invaders, and attacks them by releasing an army of chemicals in the eyes, nose, mouth and lungs. Histamines are among those chemicals, and they cause the classic symptoms associated with allergies, such as itchy eyes, sneezing, runny nose and swollen nasal tissue. This type of nasal and sinus reaction to pollen is called seasonal allergic rhinitis or rhinosinusitis.

Levels of Treatments

For patients experiencing the milder allergy symptoms of sneezing, itching or runny nose, antihistamines like Claritin or Zyrtec may be helpful. However patients with more severe congestive symptoms or sufferers of perennial allergic rhinitis, (which can be triggered year round by mold, pet dander, and dust mites) may be advised to see their doctor or an ear, nose, and throat (ENT) specialist. These patients often do better with the more effective prescription nasal allergy sprays such as Nasonex, Flonase or Veramyst.

Besides medical treatments, patients can take a number of steps to alleviate symptoms on their own, such as maintaining a home filtration system, and shutting house and car windows to keep pollen out. Up to date pollen counts as well as pollen forecasts for most US localities can be found at [.pollen.com](http://pollen.com). For perennial rhinitis, patients should keep bed linens, drapes and pets clean, and limit or eliminate carpeting and other sources of dust and mold build-up.

For a small percentage of patients the above measures may fail to alleviate nasal congestion or even increase and aggravate their sinus infections. Fortunately, new and effective surgical options are now available. These sufferers can get relief by undergoing

a minimally invasive procedure called *Balloon Sinuplasty*, in which the surgeon inserts a tiny catheter into the sinus cavity and then gently inflates a balloon to open up the sinus passageway. Other patients can also benefit from another newer procedure called *Coblation Turbinate Reduction*, which can safely reduce the thickness of inflamed nasal tissue and help restore normal breathing and nasal functioning. Your ENT specialist can help you determine if additional treatment will help.

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