

Give Your Allergies the Brush-Off



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Family Eyewear Gallery

Sure signs of the arrival of spring are the itchy noses and watery eyes that herald the new bloom. And what should come as no surprise to St. Louis residents, the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America has named it one of the worst places for allergy sufferers.

The word allergy comes from the Greek "allos" meaning "other" and "ergon" meaning "work". The body's immune system, whose job is to fight infection causing agents, attacks harmless particles like dust and pollen.

Typical reactions include itchy and runny nose; asthma or wheezing; and red, itchy and watery eyes. These are the sites that are most exposed to airborne allergens so this is where the defense cells mount their attack.

Air pollution, pollen and climate all play a role in causing airborne allergies. In addition to the environmental factors, if your parents have allergies, your chances are increased due to genetic factors.

In our culture of hypervigilance against bacteria and the prevalence of antibacterial products, many people are surprised to learn that there is a relationship between exposure to bacteria and viruses early childhood and a decrease in incidence of allergies later in life.

Children who grow up in large families, with pets or who attend daycare, are at lower risk for developing allergies. The theory is that early exposure to viruses and bacteria helps the immune system learn to recognize which particles to attack and which particles are harmless.



Treatment

The best form of treatment is avoiding exposure to the allergen. One easy way to reduce exposure is by bathing before bedtime. Pollutants that become trapped in hair throughout the day are then rubbed into pillowcases and subsequently all over the face. Washing hair before going to bed is a simple way to prevent this type of exposure.

Sometimes, however, as with most airborne allergens, avoidance is not possible. In that case, allergies are treated with the use of medications. The goal of medical therapy is to reduce the immune system's attack on the environmental allergens and to suppress the body's inflammatory reaction.

In the case of ocular allergies, some eye-drops are available over the counter. Two such drops are Alaway and Zaditor. Both require twice a day application and are available at drugstores and department stores.

When allergies are more severe, there are additional drops available by prescription. Some treat the ocular itch and some treat the watering, while others treat both. Because of the variety of medical therapies available, each person's symptoms can be specifically treated without having to use a systemic drug that can have its own side effects.

The side effects of systemic allergy remedies include dry eye and discomfort with the use of contact lenses. Both of these issues can also be addressed by your optometrist.

Dry eyes are easily treated with either over the counter or prescription artificial tears or by blocking the outflow of tears.

Contact lenses are made of various materials, some with higher oxygen permeability than others. Silicone hydrogel contact lenses allow the greatest amount of oxygen transmission and are made by most major contact lens manufacturers. We can recommend the best

lens for you based on the shape of your cornea and your prescription.

The other type of contact lens that works well for allergy sufferers is a daily disposable lens. Because each lens is fresh and clean, it minimizes any irritation caused by contact lens deposits. The most commonly fitted daily disposable lens is the Focus Daily lens.

Between the multiple systemic and ocular therapies and the appropriate use of contact lenses, ocular allergies don't have to slow you down. Call us today for an evaluation of your symptoms and I'm sure we can improve your experience this spring!

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