



Allergies, Allergies, Allergies

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In Louisville, it seems we are always in an allergy season. Most people, however, have many more allergy problems in the spring and fall. A few years back, Louisville was noted as the nation's leading city in the sale of prescription and non-prescription allergy medications.

Airborne allergies experienced in the spring and fall can be caused by chemicals and pollution in the air, pollen, smoke, and residue from cleaning and beauty products. As we grow increasingly sensitive to everyday substances, we have learned that there are multitudes of compounds that may cause allergic responses. Our reactions to these allergens can be mild, including itchy skin, a rash, headache or feeling as if you have a temperature. Most frequently, we suffer from one or more of "Allergy's Big Five" ---sneezing, wheezing, sinus pain, running nose and red, watery, itchy eyes. These "Big Five" have one thing in common; it is your body's reaction to try to rid itself of the allergen.

Many medications that were recently prescription are now available without a prescription, making allergy relief more readily available. Caution is advised because many new combinations have names similar to well-known products. If you are restarting the use of an allergy medication, closely look at the label to make sure that it is identical to what you have taken in the past.

One of the more common medications include antihistamines. These work against allergies by trying to block the body's release of histamines released during an allergic reaction. They often can make you drowsy or affect your sleep. Over the past year, several popular, non-sedating, allergy medications became available without a prescription. These medications have the big advantage of the traditional antihistamines, but the advantage comes with a higher cost. Antihistamines are also available combined with decongestants, which are drying agents. They can dry the nasal, ear and eye drainage and congestion and are available in a variety of over-the-counter items taken by mouth or used as eye drops. Decongestant nasal sprays may cause rebound congestion when used

more than three or four days. Depending on the combination of the medications, some non-prescription, over-the-counter medications may need to be obtained at the prescription counter.

Corticosteroids, which require a prescription, are used to treat the itching and swelling associated with a variety of allergic disorders. The most commonly used forms are corticosteroid nasal sprays for allergic inflammation of the nasal and sinus cavities. Corticosteroid creams are also used to treat hives, dermatitis, and insect sting reactions, and are also used as an inhalation for the treatment of asthma.

Each of us will respond as differently to the allergy medications we take as we do to the allergens that cause our distress. How we manage all of our medications is extremely important. Starting new allergy medications can be more problematic if you are taking blood pressure, heart or circulatory medications. Regardless of which medications you select, read the product labels and know the side effects. Discuss the use of the allergy medications with your pharmacist or other healthcare provider.

There are many things you can do to free yourself of allergens or at least avoid more of them.

- Change the filter in your home air system frequently as well as your vacuum cleaner bags.
- Recirculate the air within your car.
- Shower and wash your hair before going to bed each night.
- If you can't wash your hair each night, place a new pillowcase on your pillow each evening.
- Remove your shoes when entering the house, if possible.
- Use saline nasal spray in your nose several times a day and gently blow your nose.

