



Ailing from allergies?

2013 expected to be bad allergy year

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The Review

If you're one of the unlucky ones who suffers from seasonal allergies, hold on to your Kleenex box.

"This is going to be a bad allergy year," said Starrla Huskins, allergy nurse at the office of Dr. David Kanagy, a member of the Alliance Community Medical Foundation. "Pollens are already high. Usually, you don't get a grass pollen until toward the middle or end of May. We've already had grass in the pollen count."

Huskins, who gathers the pollen and mold counts from the Canton Health Department each day, said the worst time for seasonal allergies is late April through September. She said it begins with tree pollen, then grasses, and by the middle of summer it is the weeds — especially ragweed — wreaking havoc.

However, Huskins said allergies can cause trouble throughout the year. "Just about everybody is allergic to molds. When we have the high humid weather and then the rainy weather, we're dealing with molds year-round," she explained.

Huskins said there are many kinds of molds, such as those that grow on vegetation, foods, cereal grains, books and magazines, and even pine trees, which are often brought into homes during the Christmas season.

Some people are more affected by allergies than others. Huskins said those with a weakened immune system are more prone to having allergy problems. "That's why we see a lot of elderly people now who have trouble with allergies, because as they get older, their immune systems become weaker," she explained.

In the same way, she said allergies can affect young children.

So, how do you know if you or your child is affected by seasonal allergies rather than a common cold? Huskins said one of the main ways to tell the difference is that allergies cause clear drainage, whereas colds typically come with green or yellow drainage. Colds may also be accompanied by a fever or sore throat, although post nasal drainage from allergies can cause a sore throat as well.

Other symptoms of seasonal allergies are itchy eyes, sneezing, itchy skin, nasal congestion, nasal swelling and headaches.

"Allergies can actually affect every system in the body, depending upon what kind of allergy you have," Huskins said. "One of the major complaints of allergy patients is fatigue because they can't breathe, so

ALLERGY Q & A

Q: Are allergies rare?

A: No. Approximately 20 percent of the U.S. population has one or more types of allergy. Allergy symptoms account for more visits to the doctor's office than any other single disease and are a leading cause of school absenteeism in this country.

Q: What are allergies?

A: Allergies are abnormal physical reactions you experience when you are exposed to substances (allergens) to which you have developed an allergy. These substances are usually harmless and do not produce symptoms in normal, non-allergic people.

Q: How does a person become allergic?

A: Your body produces antibodies to ward off infection and other diseases. When your immune system misidentifies a normally harmless substance, it begins building antibodies toward that specific substance. These antibodies in your blood trigger allergic symptoms when you are re-exposed to that substance.

Q: How do you get exposed to allergy-producing substances?

A: The air you breathe contains minute particles. The type of particles in the air will vary according to your location, the time of year and moisture in your environment. Common causes of allergies are plant pollens — trees, weeds, grasses; house dust particles; mold spores; animal hair and dander; and insect particles. Foods you eat can also cause allergic reactions, but usually produce different symptoms. Substances you touch can cause allergic reactions and are usually evident in the form of a rash on parts of your body.

Q: Are allergies inherited?

A: No, but the tendency to become allergic can be inherited. Studies show if one of your parents had allergies, you have a 50 percent chance of becoming allergic. If both of your parents were allergic, your chances of developing allergies is as high as 80 percent.

they're not getting enough oxygen in order to feel good."

When it comes to treating allergies, people often rely on over-the-counter medications to deal with symptoms. Huskins said good options include antihistamines, such as Allegra, Xyrtec and Claritin, or the use of nasal sprays and nasal steroids to help reduce the swelling of the nasal passages.

To determine exactly what is causing the misery of their allergy patients, Huskins does intradermal allergy testing and then offers allergy immunotherapy to help patients develop antibodies and ease symptoms. She said the injection program typically lasts three years and involves one year of weekly injections, one year of biweekly injections and one year of monthly injections.

"A lot of patients will stay on (the injections) simply because they feel better with the shots, but the theory is three to five years and you take them off and see if their immune system has developed those antibodies and see how they do," she explained.

Huskins said it is also important to avoid allergy triggers, so she gives her patients the following advice:

- Stay indoors as much as possible when allergies are at their worst.
- Keep windows closed and air-conditioning on in hot weather.
- Get pollen covers for your mattress and pillows to keep the dust mites at bay.
- Don't hang clothes outside to dry, as they will bring pollens inside.
- If you have a ragweed allergy, avoid eating wheat during ragweed season, as it will aggravate your symptoms.

Huskins stressed that if symptoms get too severe and can't be controlled by over-the-counter medications, you should visit your doctor to see if you might benefit from allergy testing.

Review Photos
KEVIN GRAFF



ABOVE: A collection of vials used in allergy testing.

LEFT: Starrla Huskins, LPN, of Dr. David Kanagy's office, holds pamphlets about allergies. Huskins does intradermal allergy testing and offers immunotherapy through injections to help relieve allergy symptoms. **BELOW:** Needles sit in vials before samples are divided for allergy testing.



Cleaning the right way to remove allergens

When you're done with spring cleaning, you may assume you've eliminated any allergy triggers that were lurking in your home. But the truth is, if you don't clean the right way, you might be making the problem worse.

More than 40 million Americans suffer from allergy problems, and 25 million have asthma. If your cleaning routine doesn't specifically focus on allergen control and removal, you may be only moving dust around, sending allergens and irritating cleaning chemicals into the air, which can affect allergy and asthma symptoms. To maximize your cleaning efforts and reduce allergens, consider these simple tips from the asthma and allergy friendly Certification Program, the healthy home initiative of the nonprofit Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA):

■ Use a certified vacuum that has a high-efficiency filter with tight seams and seals to prevent particles from leaking out while you vacuum. Also, choose a style that requires minimal exposure during canister emptying or bag changes.

■ Dusting improperly can actually increase airborne dust particles in your home. Use moist cloths or special dry dusters designed to trap and lock dust from hard surfaces. Use vacuum attachments to remove dust from soft and upholstered surfaces.

■ Certain cleaning products can also contribute to airborne irritants, especially if they contain harsh chemicals, strong odors or volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Choose products that contain none of these

irritants, but also beware of "green" labels, as some of these solutions may be made with natural allergenic ingredients, such as lemon, coconut or tea-tree oils.

■ Rodent dander and cockroach particles are common household asthma triggers. However, some pesticides may do more harm than good for people with asthma and allergies. If you have a pest problem, look for an exterminator with expertise in integrated pest management and experience treating homes of people with asthma.

■ Whether you have a cat or dog, pet dander is present in most U.S. homes. If it is possible, keep pets out of the bedroom. Your cleaning routine should include frequently washing linens in your bedroom, where cat or dog dander can settle.

■ Place certified allergen barrier covers on your mattresses and pillows. Wash your bedding at least once a week in 130-degree or higher hot water to kill dust mites and their eggs.

■ Mold, a common allergy trigger, can grow anywhere in your home where moisture is present. Look for cleaning products that help kill and prevent mold from returning. Also, keep household humidity below 50 percent and fix leaky pipes and cracks to reduce standing puddles of moisture where mold can prosper.

■ If children live in your home, look for certified plush toys. Dust mites, mold and pet dander can accumulate on plush toys over time. Certified toys can be placed in the freezer for 24 hours, then rinsed in cold water to

remove dead mites. Dry completely. Do this monthly.

■ Lots of air passes through window areas, and airborne dust and allergens accumulate on all types of window treatments — which are rarely cleaned. In the family room and throughout the home, replace big, heavy linen drapes with more sensible window treatments, such as wood blinds or flat screens, that are easy to wipe and keep clean.

■ If your home uses central air-conditioning or heat, replace the filter in the machine regularly, typically every 30 to 90 days. Choose an HVAC filter that has been certified to effectively capture fine airborne particles like pollen, dust and dander.

Keep in mind that while consumers spend nearly \$18 billion annually on asthma and allergy medications, they also spend more than \$20 billion on nonmedical consumer products marketed for people with asthma and allergies, such as room air cleaners, bedding, vacuums and more, according to AAFA. While demand for such products continues to grow, there is little regulation governing product claims, the foundation notes. AAFA's asthma and allergy friendly Certification Program helps consumers evaluate and verify the allergen-reducing effectiveness of a variety of products, from cleaning supplies, air cleaning devices and vacuums to toys, bedding, home improvement products, paints, clothes washers and more. You can learn more at www.AAFA.org/certified.

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