

Allergic Rhinitis (Hay fever)

Overview:

- Allergic rhinitis occurs when the immune system reacts to certain allergens.
- Signs and symptoms of allergic rhinitis can be very similar to those of common cold or a flu, but they usually go away when the allergen is gone.
- Having other allergies is a risk factor for allergic rhinitis.
- Allergic rhinitis treatments focus on alleviating symptoms rather than treating the allergy itself.
- Staying away from allergens is the best way to prevent allergic rhinitis.

Definition of Allergies:

Allergies occur when the immune system reacts to a foreign substance (such as pollen, mites, fungi, or certain foods), that doesn't normally cause a reaction in most people.

The immune system is responsible for attacking harmful substances that enter the body. However during an allergic reaction, the immune system is responding to a false alarm and instead it attacks non-harmful substances by producing antibodies (such as histamines). This is what causes symptoms of allergies to appear. People who have allergies are often sensitive to more than one substance.

Definition of Allergic Rhinitis:

Allergic rhinitis, also known as hay fever, is a type of inflammation in the lining of the nasal cavity, which occurs when the immune system overreacts to allergens in the air. A range of symptoms begin to appear within minutes of exposure to these substances, and they can affect a patient's ability to sleep, work, and concentrate in school.

Other names:

Hay fever

The difference between allergic rhinitis and a common cold or a flu:

- The symptoms of allergic rhinitis persist as long as the patient is exposed to allergens, however a common cold or a flu lasts 3-7 days.
- Unlike a cold, allergic rhinitis does not cause fever.
- Nasal discharge due to allergic rhinitis is thin and watery, while runny nose due to a cold or a flu is usually thicker.
- Itchiness (mostly in the eyes, nose, mouth, throat and skin) is a common symptom of allergic rhinitis and not a cold or a flu.

Causes:

- Genetic Factors: If a relative such as a parent or a sibling suffers from allergic rhinitis, then the risk of developing allergic rhinitis increases.
- Pollen is often the main trigger of allergic rhinitis. Hot, dry and windy weather signals greater pollen distribution, especially during pollination season, which increases allergy symptoms. However, allergy symptoms are often minimal on cold days that are rainy, cloudy or windless. Symptom severity can vary from person to person and from region to region.
- Allergens in the environment, such as pet hair, dust, mold, and some types of smoke or odors.

Symptoms:

- Sneezing.
- Cough.
- Itchy nose, mouth, throat or skin).
- Runny nose.



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- Nasal congestion.
- Under-eye swelling.
- Headache.
- Sore throat.
- Watery, swollen, red eyes.

When to see a doctor:

If your symptoms do not improve within 2-4 weeks, or if the symptoms start to affect your daily performance and productivity levels.

Diagnosis:

To diagnose allergic rhinitis, your doctor examines the patient's family history and medical history, and then performs a physical examination of the nasal cavity to make sure there is no swelling or inflammation. A rhinoscope may be used to examine the inside of the nose if needed.

Risk factors:

- The following factors can increase your risk of developing allergic rhinitis:
- Having other allergies or other conditions (such as: asthma, eczema, and others).
- A family member suffering from any type of allergy.
- Persistent or repetitive exposure to allergens at the workplace or at home.

Complications:

Leaving allergy symptoms untreated can lead to the following complications:

- Worsening asthma.
- Sinusitis

- Middle ear infections.

Treatment:

Allergic rhinitis treatments focus on alleviating symptoms rather than treating the allergy itself, and these include:

- **Prescription medications:**
 - Antihistamines (pills, sprays or drops).
 - Steroid nasal sprays
 - Decongestants (tablets or drops)
- **Home remedies:**
 - If the symptoms are mild, rinse your nasal passages with saline solution which can be purchased from the pharmacy or prepared at home.

Prevention:

The best way to prevent allergic rhinitis is by reducing your exposure to allergens and managing how much you interact with the external environment. This can be achieved by applying the following guidelines:

- Make sure to tightly shut your windows at home and in your car and avoid going to gardens and parks during spring and early summer when pollen counts are high (pollination season).
- Stay away from animals that can trigger your allergy such as cats, horses and birds.
- Limit your exposure to dust mites as much as possible. (Dust mites are microscopic bugs that live in household dust and feed on dead human skin cells during sleep. When the feces of dust mites found flying in the air, are inhaled they trigger allergy symptoms. Dust mites live on pillow and bed covers, curtains, carpets, and upholstered furniture). You can limit your exposure to dust mites by:
 - Use dust -proof pillow and mattress cover.



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- Avoid using feather pillows and wool blankets.
- Wash your pillow and mattress covers at least once a week.
- The floors and carpets should be cleaned and vacuumed regularly, but not by someone who has allergies.
- Clean your furniture with a water-dampened cloth.
- Minimize the amount of furniture in your bedroom and replace regular curtains with metal blinds.
- Keep your clothes in closed cupboards.
- Animals shouldn't be allowed in the bedroom.

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