

# SHOULD I SEE MY DOCTOR FOR MY Seasonal Allergies?



Fresh cut grass, flowers blossoming, trees blooming—spring can certainly be a sight for sore eyes. But, if you're one of the millions of people who have seasonal allergies, spring isn't such a welcome sight. To be sure, seasonal allergies can make you feel downright miserable!

## What Causes Seasonal Allergies?

You can blame pollen if you suffer from seasonal allergies. Pollen is a harmless powdery substance made by trees, weeds, and grasses. If you have seasonal allergies, your body mistakes pollen for something dangerous, kicking your immune system into high gear. Your immune response has one goal: eliminate this dangerous enemy. As your body works to rid of this perceived invader you may experience several unpleasant symptoms like congestion, sneezing, watery eyes, and wheezing.

## When Should I See a Doctor?

Most seasonal allergies can be managed with some specific strategies (see the Seasonal Self-Care section). However, it's a good idea to seek professional medical care if:

- Your allergies are causing symptoms such as chronic sinus infections, nasal congestion, tightness in your chest, or difficulty breathing.
- You experience symptoms several months out of the year. Antihistamines and over-the-counter medications do not control your allergy symptoms or create unacceptable side effects, such as drowsiness.
- Your doctor may recommend a skin or blood test to identify the specific allergens triggering your symptoms. The results of these tests can also help determine the treatments that will work best for you.

## FACT OR FICTION?



There's a common belief that desert climates can cure or eliminate seasonal allergies. This is largely a myth. Grass and ragweed pollens are found nearly everywhere. Moving to a different climate may curb your symptoms, but your relief could be short-lived. You may have reactions to the allergens in your new environment after you move.

## Seasonal Self-Care

If you suffer from seasonal allergies, you may think that dealing with sneezing, itchy eyes, and congestion are just a fact of life. But this doesn't have to be the case. Fortunately, there are several self-care strategies that may help keep your symptoms at bay.

**Keep your car and home windows shut.** It's tempting to open the windows for some fresh air on a nice spring day, but opening the windows allows pollen and allergens to come right in.

**Change your furnace/air conditioner filter** every three months and consider investing in an air purifier. Air purifiers are designed to clean the air in a room by trapping allergens and pushing filtered, clean air back into the space.

**Be strategic if you're spending time outdoors.** More pollen is in the air on hot, dry, windy days. On cool, damp, rainy days, most pollen is washed to the ground. If possible, try to avoid being outdoors on dry, windy day.

**Consider over-the-counter allergy meds.** Nasal corticosteroid sprays and OTC allergy medications like Claritin® may help.

**Talk to your doctor** if you have any questions or concerns about OTC medications.