



How To Deal With Seasonal Allergies

The sun is shining (finally) and things are starting to dry out. With the beautiful weather comes blooming flowers, grasses, and trees and inevitably the pollen that they release. If your child is starting to suffer from the misery of seasonal allergies, here are a few things to try before calling or heading in to the office:

1. **Take a bath/shower and wash your hair before bed.** Did you know that men with moustaches have worse hay fever symptoms than men without moustaches? It seems obvious but hair under the nose acts like a pollen catcher and "feeds" pollen and allergens right into your nostrils!! Likewise, your child's beautiful head of hair collects pollen all day long. If they go to bed without washing it out, they "take a pollen bath" all night long!! It's no wonder that they are all stuffy and congested in the morning. It also helps to change their pillowcase a few times a week during the peak allergy season--just to remove what the shampooing doesn't get.

2. **Try a non-sedating antihistamine.** Claritin (loratadine) and Zyrtec (cetirizine) have been OTC for a few years. These medications come in generic alternatives too and should usually be your first step in medicating anybody who has significant allergy symptoms. Because the medications have a long half-life, they only need to be taken once daily; but also because of this they need to be taken consistently. It takes a few days for the body to build up the full medication level. Using these meds on an occasional basis just doesn't work well. So start them when the allergy symptoms begin and then give it a week before evaluating how much they are helping. With all of the newer, non-sedating anti-histamines available, there is really NO role for giving anybody Benadryl (diphenhydramine) for anything other than an acute severe allergic reaction. It is just too sedating and doesn't last very long.

3. **Come in for a prescription.** Sometimes an anti-histamine just can't do it alone. Think of an anti-histamine as being like a mop, cleaning up all of the histamine that is being "spilled" out by your inflammatory cells in response to pollen. There is only so fast you can mop up a spill. If things keep getting spilled fast enough, the mopping just gets overwhelmed. So when people tell me that the anti-histamine isn't helping, it's really that it's just not helping enough. That's when we need to ADD

something else to the regimen to target specific symptoms. If the eyes are really red and itchy, there are eye drops (both prescription and OTC) to help that. If the biggest problem is nasal congestion and sneezing, there are different kinds of nasal sprays to help (some help the eyes too).

4. **Be realistic about your goals.** There is no allergy medication that will completely rid you of symptoms. They will reduce them. The goal is to find a mix of medications/interventions that will allow your child to be active, go outside, participate in activities and sleep comfortably. At what point to start medication or when to add another one is really a decision made by the patient, the parent and the physician together to try to minimize the symptoms and keep the child active.

--Be Well

Drew Nash, M.D.