



Seasonal allergies, also known as seasonal allergic rhinitis, are a problem for many patients, and can significantly affect their quality of life. It is estimated up to 40% of children and 55 % of adults in the United States suffer from seasonal allergies. Allergic rhinitis is an inflammation of the nasal passages that can occur in response to airborne allergens including pollen and ragweed or indoor allergens such as pet dander and dust mites. Seasonal allergies usually occur in the fall and spring seasons when outdoor molds release spores or when trees, grasses and weeds release tiny pollen particles into the air to fertilize other plants. Symptoms may include sneezing, runny nose, congestion and itchy, watery eyes.

Seasonal allergies are fairly easy to identify because the pattern of symptoms returns from year to year following the exposure to an allergen. Allergy prevention is the first step to managing seasonal allergies. Some steps to decrease allergen exposure include: use air conditioning instead of opening windows or doors, shower and change clothes after being outdoors, avoid outdoor activities and wash hands, face and hair often during the pollen season. Allergens cannot be completely avoided and therefore drug therapy is often needed to alleviate symptoms.

If reducing exposure to allergens is ineffective or not possible, there are several over-the-counter medications available to help relieve symptoms and treat allergic rhinitis. These medications include decongestants, antihistamines and mast cell stabilizers. A decongestant is a type of drug that is used to relieve nasal congestion. Histamine is released in patients with allergies which cause many symptoms such as itchy eyes and sneezing. Antihistamines work to block this release. Mast cell stabilizers also work to block the release of histamine through a separate mechanism. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist if you think you have seasonal allergies to help get symptoms better under control.

Common over the counter medications for allergies:

<b>Antihistamines</b> (relief of watery eyes, and runny nose)	<b>Decongestants</b> (relief of nasal congestion)
Claritin (loratadine)	Sudafed (pseudophedrine)
Zyrtec (cetirizine)	SudafedPE (phenylephrine)
Benadryl (diphenhydramine)	Afrin (nasal spray) oxymetazoline