



# Loss Control Insights

Spring Allergies

Spring is the time of year that we normally think of when it comes to seasonal allergies. As the trees start to bloom and the pollen gets airborne, allergy sufferers begin their annual ritual of sniffing and sneezing. Each year, 35 million Americans fall prey to seasonal allergic rhinitis, more commonly known as hay fever. Although there is no magical cure for spring allergies, there are a number of ways to combat them, from medication to household habits.

The biggest spring allergy trigger is pollen -- tiny grains released into the air by trees, grasses, and weeds for the purpose of fertilizing other plants. When pollen grains get into the nose of someone who's allergic, they send the immune system into overdrive.

The immune system, mistakenly seeing the pollen as foreign invaders, releases antibodies -- substances that normally identify and attack bacteria, viruses, and other illness-causing organisms. The antibodies attack the allergens, which leads to the release of chemicals called histamines into the blood. Histamines trigger the runny nose, itchy eyes, and other symptoms of allergies.

Pollen can travel for miles, spreading a path of misery for allergy sufferers along the way. The higher the pollen count, the greater the misery. The pollen count measures the amount of allergens in the air in grains per cubic meter. You can find out the daily pollen count in your area by watching your local weather forecast.

If you've never been formally diagnosed with spring allergies but you notice that your eyes and nose are itchy and runny during the spring months, see your doctor. Your doctor may refer you to an allergist for tests.

## **What's the treatment for spring allergies?**

Doctors treat spring allergies with a number of over-the-counter and prescription drugs. Over-the-counter allergy drugs are often effective for many people and include the following: antihistamines, antihistamines/decongestants combination, nasal spray decongestants, cromolyn sodium nasal spray and eye drops

Even though you can buy these allergy drugs without a prescription, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor first to make sure you choose the right medication. Some antihistamines can make you feel sleepy, so you need to be careful when taking them during the day (although non-drowsy formulations are also available). Don't use over-the-counter antihistamines and decongestants for more than a few days without talking to your doctor.

## **How to manage spring allergies**

It's nearly impossible to completely avoid spring allergies if you live in an area where plants grow. However, you can ease sniffing, sneezing, and watery eyes by avoiding your main allergy triggers. Here are a few tips.

- Try to stay indoors whenever the pollen count is very high (pollen counts usually peak in the mornings).
- Keep your doors and windows closed whenever possible during the spring months to keep allergens out. An air purifier may also help.
- Clean the air filters in your home often. Also, clean bookshelves, vents, and other places where pollen can collect.
- Wash your hair after going outside, because pollen can collect there.
- Vacuum twice a week. Wear a mask because vacuuming can kick up pollen, mold, and dust that were trapped in your carpet