

APRIL 2013 • MEMBERS

Allergy Avoidance

Spring is here again. The birds are singing and it's warming up. Most of us are happy about this, but some may be dreading springtime. This is because some people have more problems with allergies in the spring. Plants are growing and flowers are blooming—and the pollen count is rising.

What are allergies?

An allergy is a reaction to things called allergens. Allergens make our eyes red and itchy. They cause us to sneeze and cough. They give us stuffy or runny noses. Sometimes they make it hard for us to breathe. Examples of allergens include pollen from flowers, trees, and other plants. Mold, animal dander, house dust mites, and cockroach saliva, fecal material, and cast skins are also allergens.

Allergies can be a year-round problem

As you can guess from the list of allergens above, some people have allergies all year. That's because many of the allergens (such as dust mites) are not seasonal. Some of them are around us all year. But avoiding the allergens that trigger your symptoms should help you feel better.

Some tips for avoiding allergens

Once you know which allergens cause your symptoms, you can try to avoid them. Avoiding them should help you feel better. If you're allergic to pollen,

- Stay indoors as much as possible when the pollen count is high.
- Have someone clear out the weeds around your house.
- Keep windows closed and use an air conditioner. Have someone change the filter often.
- If you're allergic to them, don't plant zinnias, chrysanthemums, marigolds, dahlias, or sunflowers in your yard. Stay away from them whenever you can.
- When you return from an outing, shower and wash your hair to remove pollen.

If you're allergic to molds that live outdoors,

- Don't walk through uncut fields.
- Avoid mowing grass, handling mulch or compost, raking leaves, or working with hay.
- Avoid barns, greenhouses, sleeping bags, and summer cottages.
- Keep windows and doors closed.
- Avoid using fans that draw in outside air—use air conditioning.



Finding out which allergens cause your symptoms

There are 2 types of commonly used tests that can help you find out which allergen(s) triggers your symptoms. One is a skin test. The other is a blood test. A skin test requires a separate puncture for each allergen that might be causing your symptoms. With the blood test, there is only one skin puncture. Many allergens can be tested using just one blood sample.

Quest Diagnostics offers the ImmunoCap® blood test. Your doctor can choose from over 200 allergens to tailor the test for you.

If you're allergic to molds that live indoors,

- Fix all water leaks.
- Use air conditioning and a dehumidifier.
- Frequently clean furnace filters, the refrigerator, and the dehumidifier.
- Thoroughly dry clothes before storing.
- Clean moldy areas with fungicide or bleach.
- Throw away moldy things.
- Use the bathroom vent when showering or bathing.
- Don't live in the basement.

If you're allergic to cockroaches,

- Use insecticides, bait traps, or a professional exterminator to get rid of them.
- Don't store paper bags, newspapers, or cardboard boxes.
- Vacuum thoroughly.
- Wash dishes daily.
- Keep food or garbage in closed containers, and take out the garbage regularly.
- Seal plumbing openings, cracks, and crevices.

If you're allergic to cats or dogs, it's best to not have them for a pet.

If you do have one,

- Keep it outdoors as much as possible.
- Keep it out of your bedroom.
- Keep it in a room with a polished floor and wipeable furniture.
- Use a HEPA filter.
- Wash it weekly in warm water.
- Use allergen-proof covers for mattresses, pillows, and box springs.

If you're allergic to house dust mites,

- Keep the bedroom clean and avoid clutter.
- Vacuum or dust weekly.
- Use allergen-proof covers for mattresses and pillows.
- Wash bedding weekly in hot water.
- Change furnace and air conditioner filters regularly.
- Stay out of the room when it's being cleaned or else wear a mask.
- Replace upholstered furniture with leather, vinyl, wood, or plastic furniture.
- Wash window curtains often.

Additional information

For more information, visit QuestDiagnostics.com/allergy or these helpful websites:

- www.aaaai.org/home.aspx
- www.aafa.org/
- www.health.nih.gov/topic/allergy