Treating Seasonal Allergies

Over-the-counter allergy drugs are effective for many people and include the following:

- **Antihistamines** reduce sneezing, sniffing, and itching by lowering the amount of histamine (the substance produced during an allergic reaction) in the body.
- **Decongestants** clear mucus out of the nasal passageways to relieve congestion and swelling.
- **Antihistamine/decongestants** combine the effects of both drugs.
- **Nasal spray decongestants** relieve congestion and may clear clogged nasal passages faster than oral decongestants.
- **Cromolyn sodium nasal spray** can provide relief by stopping the release of histamine before it can trigger allergy symptoms.
- **Eye drops** relieve itchy, watery eyes.

**Nasal irrigation**

Nasal irrigation with a combination of warm water, about a quarter-teaspoon of salt, and a quarter-teaspoon of baking soda may help clear out mucus and open sinus passages. You can administer the solution through a squeeze bottle or a neti pot -- a device that looks like a small teapot. Use distilled, sterile, or previously boiled water to make up the irrigation solution. It’s also important to rinse the irrigation device after each use and leave open to air dry.

**Allergy shots**

If over-the-counter or home remedies don’t help allergies, your nurse practitioner or doctor may recommend a prescription medication or allergy shots. Prescription nasal sprays with corticosteroids reduce inflammation in the nose. Allergy shots expose your body to gradually increasing doses of the allergen until you become tolerant of it. They can relieve your symptoms for a longer period of time than oral and nasal allergy medications. Although they don’t work for everyone, in people who do see a response, allergy shots can stave off symptoms for a few years.

Additional tips to manage spring allergies

It’s nearly impossible to completely avoid seasonal allergies if you live in an area where plants grow. However, you can ease sniffling, 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.