Although allergies come in many forms, allergic rhinitis is the most common allergy condition. Symptoms can include:
- sneezing
- runny, stuffy, or itchy nose
- itchy, watery eyes
- temporary loss of smell
- headache
- postnasal drip
- tiredness

Allergy symptoms may seem like cold symptoms, but usually last longer. A child or adult with allergies and a stuffy nose may breathe through the mouth and frequently rub the nose. The most common causes of allergies are particles in the air, such as pollen, house dust mites, animal dander, and mold or mildew. Allergies seem to run in families. Parents with allergies often have children with allergies. Allergic rhinitis often appears in childhood, but can occur at any age.

You can sometimes discover the cause of an allergy by noting when your symptoms occur. Symptoms that occur at the same time each year, especially during spring, early summer, or early fall, are often due to tree, grass, or weed pollen, respectively. Allergies that seem to persist all year long may be due to house dust mites, animals, or mold spores. Animal allergies are often easy to detect, as staying away from the animal improves the symptoms. This is provided the animal is the only allergy.

Prevention
Although there is no cure for allergic rhinitis, avoiding the substances that cause allergy attacks will help.
- See the index of your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook for information on food allergies.
- Call the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone (1-800-33-ASK ME) and select tapes #320 and #429.
- Visit our online Health Encyclopedia at www.kp.org for additional topics on allergies.
- If you or your spouse have a history of allergies, consider breastfeeding your infants. There is some evidence that feeding only breast milk during the first six months of life may delay the development of food allergies.

Home treatment
Discovering and avoiding the source of your allergy is the best treatment. To figure out your triggers, keep a record of your symptoms. Note when you are exposed to pollen, dust mites, animals or mold. This can help you identify and avoid your triggers.

If your symptoms are seasonal, follow these suggestions during the pollen season:
- Keep your windows and vents closed, especially in the bedroom and car.
- Limit the time you spend outside when pollen counts are high.
- Pets that spend time outdoors may bring large amounts of pollen into your house. If possible, leave the pets outside or clean them before allowing them indoors.

If your symptoms are year-round and seem to be related to dust . . .
- Keep the bedroom as dust-free as possible, as most of your time at home is spent there. Keep the rest of your house as clean as possible.
- Try to reduce carpeting, upholstered furniture, and heavy draperies. Also reduce household items that can collect dust. Vacuum weekly with a cleaner equipped with a HEPA filter and/or special bags.
- If you are allergic to dust mites, cover your pillows, mattress, and boxspring with dust-proof covers. These can be purchased at many large retail outlets. Avoid wool blankets or down comforters and feather pillows. Wash all bedding weekly in hot water.
- Keep the house well ventilated and dry. Keep the humidity low. Use a dehumidifier during humid weather.
If your symptoms are year-round, worsen in damp weather, and seem to be related to mold or mildew . . .

• An air conditioner can help reduce humidity. Change or clean heating and cooling system filters regularly.
• Clean bathroom and kitchen surfaces often with bleach to reduce mold growth.

If you are allergic to a pet . . .

• If your symptoms are severe, the best solution may be to find a new home for the pet.
• Otherwise keep the animal outside, or at least out of your bedroom.

General information on avoiding irritants and allergens

• Avoid yard work (raking, mowing) or at least wear a mask. Yard work can stir up both pollen and mold.
• Avoid smoking and inhaling other people's smoke.
• Eliminate aerosol sprays, fragrances, room deodorizers, and cleaning products that may add to the problem.

Medications

If avoiding triggers does not relieve your symptoms, treatment with medications is the next step. Over-the-counter antihistamines, such as loratadine, are now available that are non-drowsy and often effective at relieving sneezing, runny, and stuffy nose symptoms than oral antihistamines and decongestants. It may take a combination of medications to treat all of your symptoms. Ask your provider for more information.

Alternative treatments

There are many alternative treatments promoted to help allergies. Currently, there isn't sufficient scientific evidence to support the safety or effectiveness of alternative treatments. As there have been some concerns about side effects, please talk to your provider about alternative treatments you are considering.

What about allergy shots or immunotherapy?

Allergy shots involve a series of injections, lasting three to five years, given to reduce your body's sensitivity to allergens (i.e., pollen, house dust mites and animals). Allergy shots or Immunotherapy is 80 percent effective for these allergens. Treatment is effective only if the specific allergen has been identified by testing. Immunotherapy is usually considered as a treatment option when:

• Your symptoms have bothered you for at least two years.
• You've tried home treatment without success.
• You've tried both prescription and nonprescription medications without relief.
• Tests show the specific allergies.

If symptoms worsen over time, and your home treatment doesn’t help, your provider can recommend different medications or immunotherapy.

When to call Kaiser Permanente

Signs of a severe allergic reaction include:

• severe wheezing or difficulty breathing
• swelling around the lips, tongue, or face
• lightheadedness or dizziness
• skin rash, itching, feeling of warmth, or hives

If you think you have a medical emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital.

Other resources

For more general health information, check your Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook, listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-33-ASK ME, visit our Web site at www.kp.org, or contact your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

Emergency services and care are covered if you were experiencing acute symptoms of sufficient severity, including severe pain, such that you reasonably believed that a failure to obtain immediate medical attention could result in serious jeopardy to health, serious impairment to bodily functions, or serious dysfunction of any bodily organ or part.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor. If you have questions or need additional information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.