

Allergic Rhinitis (Hay Fever)

Allergic rhinitis, which many people call “**hay fever**,” is an inflammation of the nasal passages caused by an allergic reaction. It is a type of respiratory allergy. Respiratory allergies may affect the nose (allergic rhinitis), sinuses (allergic sinusitis), or bronchial tubes (asthma). Allergic rhinitis causes symptoms primarily, but not exclusively, in the nose. In addition to the nose, the eyes, throat, and mouth may be affected.

Cause: Allergic rhinitis is caused by an allergic reaction that occurs when your immune system overreacts to a substance called an allergen. Many times allergens are carried airborne. Plants like ragweed, cattail and maple trees release their pollen to initiate their reproductive processes with nearby plants of their species. Pollens are carried by the wind, so not all of them reach their targets, and instead they land on you. For that reason, too, pollen is frequently present in the air we breathe. It is not known why people develop allergic rhinitis or other types of allergies. Many people who have allergies have family members who also have some kind of allergy.

Seasonal Allergic Rhinitis occurs during specific flowering periods when plants are shedding their pollen. In general, trees flower in the spring, grasses in the summer and weeds in the fall.

Perennial Rhinitis is characterized by year-round allergy symptoms. Most symptoms are due to pet dander, dust, mold in the house, etc.

Symptoms: The most common immediate symptoms of allergic rhinitis include:

- Sneezing repeatedly, especially after waking in the morning.
- A runny nose (rhino rhea) and postnasal drip. The drainage from a runny nose caused by allergies is usually clear and thin but may become thicker and cloudy, yellow or even green.
- Watery, itchy eyes.
- Itchy ears, nose, and throat.

Some symptoms occur almost immediately - in as little as 5 minutes - after you have been exposed to the allergen. Air pollution, diesel fumes, cigarette or wood smoke, insecticides, strong odors, perfume, and other irritating substances in the air can aggravate your symptoms.

Treatment: The first step in treatment of allergic rhinitis is to try to avoid those factors (allergens) that may cause your symptoms. If allergen avoidance fails to relieve your allergic rhinitis symptoms, or if your symptoms are severe other treatment options should be considered. Often over-the-counter medications can control symptoms.

Different **medications** treat different allergy symptoms. For example, antihistamines are generally very effective at relieving sneezing, runny nose, itching, and watery eyes; however, they are not very effective at relieving nasal congestion. Decongestants help clear the nose but do not help much with sneezing and itching. Corticosteroids treat many kinds of symptoms but can have some unwanted side effects. It may take a combination of medications to relieve all of your symptoms. If medications cannot control the symptoms or if they cause unacceptable side effects, allergy shots that may reduce or eliminate your sensitivity to the allergen that causes the allergic reaction may be considered. This treatment is called immunotherapy, which is prescribed by an allergist.

Northern Indiana tends to have high allergy levels. You can check our Allergy Alert 4 day forecast at: <http://www.pollen.com/Pollen.com.asp>.

Click on Indiana, put our zip code (46556) and see where we stand.