

Ask *the* Expert

It's that time again - Seasonal Allergies.

Spring is upon us, bringing warmer weather, sunshine and the onset of seasonal allergies in Arkansas. Because there are a multitude of causes for seasonal allergies, elimination may be difficult but there are measures that can be taken to be better prepared.

What are seasonal allergies?

Seasonal allergies are much like any other form of allergy – they develop when the body's immune system becomes sensitive to something in the environment, causing a reaction to something that is normally harmless. The climate and other environmental factors caused Arkansas to rank #9 in seasonal allergies across the country in 2014, according to Pollentec.com.

What causes seasonal allergies?

While there are many factors that play into allergies, the most common triggers broadly include various types of pollen, grass, and mold.

There are other environmental factors that may cause the onset of seasonal allergy symptoms. A huge factor is smoke – whether it be from a camp fire, burning crops or other sources, smoke tends to

be an extremely common cause of seasonal allergies in our area. Other factors may include insect bites and stings, and various chemicals such as chlorine.

What are the signs and symptoms of seasonal allergies?

Typical symptoms of seasonal allergies may include sneezing, coughing, congestion, sore throat, itchy, puffy, red and/or watery eyes and runny or stuffy nose. These symptoms can potentially last weeks. The type, severity and length of symptoms vary for each individual person.

When are seasonal allergies most common?

The peak timing for seasonal allergies in Arkansas typically runs from March – May, however some seasonal allergies may even last through the fall. There is an area of variation that is dependent on climate and specific allergens, as weather directly affects the timing of pollination. For example, a mild winter may cause plants to pollinate early. Also, a spring with heavy rains may result in rapid plant growth and lead to an increase in mold.

The severity of seasonal allergy symptoms also correlates with the daily changes in climate. These factors include temperature, rain fall, humidity and wind – each climate change (or lack thereof) contributes in its own unique way to the type and severity of

allergens that are in the air.

What allergens are most common in our area?

According to www.pollenlibrary.com, there are approximately 50 severe allergens and many more moderate allergens just in Craighead County during the peak allergy season. Tree pollen (over 30 species) is more prevalent during spring, weed and grass pollen (8 different species each) are problematic during summer and fall months, and mold and indoor allergens cause most symptoms during the winter.

What can I do to prepare for allergy season?

The most important step in preparing for allergy season is being informed. Talk with your primary care doctor or allergy specialist to determine your specific allergy triggers, the times these triggers may be more prevalent and a plan to avoid these triggers when possible.

Tracking the seasons of various triggers such as mold and pollen is made easier with tracking information that is often provided by various media outlets during peak seasons.

While outdoor activities are popular in Arkansas during spring and summer months, limiting exposure to the elements during peak allergy season can be beneficial. Taking precautions like keeping the windows in your house and car closed, staying

inside during midday and afternoon hours when pollen counts are highest, and showering after spending time outdoors can all be helpful ways to reduce exposure.

When should I seek the treatment of an allergy specialist?

For many people avoiding allergens and taking over the counter medications is enough to ease the symptoms. But if your seasonal allergies remain bothersome, reviewing your history for triggers and testing for specific allergens may be necessary to provide relief.

At NEA Baptist Clinic – our allergy specialists in the Ear, Nose and Throat Clinic, not only treat your allergy symptoms, we can pinpoint the cause of your allergies and work together to create a plan that helps to manage triggers and provide relief.

Treatment options range from simple avoidance, proper use of oral and intranasal medications, desensitization with allergy shots or sublingual immunotherapy and in office topical therapies.

You can keep track of pollen counts via www.pollen.com or the National Allergy Bureau at www.aaaai.org.

It is important to manage symptoms and triggers, as seasonal allergy symptoms can often lead to various infections and other problems if left untreated.



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