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Coping with Allergies

According to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, over 50 million Americans suffer from allergies. If you or a family member has ever had an ongoing bout of itchy and watering eyes and nose, nasal congestion and a scratchy throat, you may suffer from allergies. While allergies can be seasonal or year-round, depending on the allergen, you can reduce or eliminate symptoms through medications and preventative measures.

Allergies start when a person comes in contact with an allergen to which he or she is allergic. The immune system starts working to protect itself from the specific allergen by forming antibodies. These antibodies produce histamine, causing reactions such as sneezing, itching, watery eyes, etc. Antihistamine medications can combat some allergy symptoms; they lower the increased histamine levels.

Getting Tested

Getting an allergy test is the first step to combating allergies. A typical visit to the allergist will include a personal history and a physical exam with close examination of the eyes, nose and throat. If it appears allergies are present, then the doctor will administer a skin test (also known as a prick test). It is important to get tested if you feel you suffer from allergies. Left untreated, symptoms can lead to further complications including asthma and chronic sinus disease.

Avoiding Allergies

If you do suffer from allergies, try these simple steps to lessen your symptoms:

- Eliminate dust from your home. Clean weekly by dusting with a damp cloth, mopping the floors and vacuuming the carpets.
- Make sure good ventilation is available in mold-prone areas such as basements, bathrooms, shower stalls and fresh-food storage areas.
- Be vigilant about food allergies. When dining out, be certain to inform the staff of any food allergies. When eating in, thoroughly wash all utensils, pans and cutting boards between food preparations.

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Getting rid of a cold?

No matter what time of year, the common cold seems to make its rounds through schools, offices and homes. Once a cold virus enters your nose, you have a 95% probability that you will become infected. If you have recently been around someone with a cold, feel a cold coming on or have already gotten one, use these tips to help prevent or lessen the symptoms of the common cold.

- Take vitamin C. This antioxidant helps repair tissue, supports the immune system and protects against infection.
- Drink water. Six to eight glasses a day is the minimum you should ingest on a healthy day.
- Eat soup. Fluids help the healing process along, and hot liquids help to thin mucus and lessen sinus congestion.
- Increase your intake of hot spices and garlic. Garlic provides antibacterial properties and helps boost the immune system.
- Don't touch. This means your eyes, mouth, face or other people; touching is the easiest way to spread germs, as well as the number one way to catch a cold.
- Get plenty of rest. Sleep is one of the best ways to replenish your immune system. Aim for two or three hours more than you normally sleep.
- Limit your exercising (but don't stop). If you only have a cold, taking a walk around the block, weather permitting, will be beneficial. Exercise helps get your heart pumping and increases circulation, both of which help in the digestion process.

If your cold persists, contact your physician for additional guidance.

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