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Spring is here! Help is around the corner!

Finally, spring is here and there is magic in the air! You see bright colored flowers and green vegetation that tempt you to spend most of your time outdoors— gardening, playing sports, or hiking. But be careful if you happen to be one of the millions of people who suffer from allergies! People with allergies can encounter many problems during springtime activities.

If you suffer from allergic rhinitis (hay fever) or allergy induced asthma, the following can help in controlling your symptoms:

- Take your allergy and/or asthma medications daily as prescribed
- Close your doors and windows at night to keep pollens from gaining entry in your home (plants give off pollens in the morning, which peak in the air in the evening)
- Wear protective clothes, mask, and goggles when gardening or cutting your lawn. (also, use your rescue inhaler and/or take a non-sedating antihistamine tablet before these activities)
- Take a shower and change clothes after any outdoor activity to remove pollens from your body and hair
- Close car windows and use the air-conditioning (with the air-circulation set for inside the car) when driving.

If you suffer from eczema (skin inflammation), flare-ups can occur from inhaling pollens or after having direct contact with vegetation. Those with eczema can better enjoy their outdoor life by:

- Wearing protective clothing
- Taking a non-sedating antihistamine daily to reduce itching
- Applying emollients (lotion) to your skin twice daily
- Using medicated creams or ointments on affected areas as prescribed by your doctor.

If you suffer from food allergies, do not share foods during picnics, read labels before eating foods, and be prepared for emergencies by carrying an allergy kit that contains an epinephrine shot (EpiPen™ or Twinject™) and antihistamine (Benadryl™). If you are allergic to latex, make sure that your picnic companions are not using latex gloves to handle food.

During spring, other creatures also want to enjoy the warm weather and sunshine. If you are allergic to stings from bees, wasps, hornets, yellow jackets, or fire ants:

- Avoid going barefoot (especially when walking in grass)
- Never swat or flail at a flying insects
- Do not drink beverages from cans (insects can crawl inside)
- Keep food covered when eating outdoors (stinging insects are fond of the same foods you are)
- Cover garbage cans with tight-fitting lids
- Avoid wearing sweet-smelling perfumes, hairsprays, colognes, and deodorants
- Avoid wearing bright colored clothing with flowery patterns (bees may mistake you for flowers!)
- DO NOT rely on insect repellents (these agents do not work against stinging insects).

If you're stung by an insect, it is important to remove the stinger within 30 seconds of the sting. You can remove the stinger by flicking it out with your finger or gently scraping it out with a butter knife or credit card. The stinger can also be removed by gently placing cellophane tape over the stinger and surrounding skin and pulling the tape back off. DO NOT try to pinch the stinger out with your fingers or tweezers. This releases more venom into your skin.

People who are allergic to insect stings should always wear a Medic Alert bracelet and carry an allergy kit that contains an epinephrine shot (EpiPen™ or Twinject™) and antihistamine (Benadryl™), which must be used according to your doctor's directions. Immediately call 911 after using an epinephrine shot.

Spring is a good time to visit an allergist to find out what substances are causing your allergic reactions and to get the appropriate treatment. Allergies can easily be diagnosed with simple skin tests or blood tests. Skin tests are more sensitive, cost-effective, and take only 20 minutes to do when compared to blood tests.

If you are one of those people who dread spring because your allergies go haywire, please worry no more. Help is available so you can enjoy this wonderful season just like anyone else!

About the author:

Natarajan Asokan, M.D., F.A.A.P. is a board certified allergist and immunologist and a board certified pediatrician with over 25 years of experience as a physician and 7 years of experience as a practicing allergist & immunologist. He treats adults and children with various allergy & immunology problems. He can be reached at 1739, Beverly Ave, Suite 118, Kingman, AZ 86409, Tel: 928-681-5800 or at 1975 HWY 95, Bullhead City, AZ 86442, Tel: 928-758-6200 or at www.trinityallergy.com

