POLLEN ALLERGY

Airborne pollen grains are a major trigger of a variety of allergic symptoms. Pollen grains are reproductive structures of seed bearing plants. Most pollens of allergic importance are wind-borne and too small to be seen by the unaided eye. If the pollen is easily seen, it is usually too large as well as too heavy to be an important allergen. Most plants with windborne pollen are drab with inconspicuous flowers. Generally, the heavy pollens of showy plants with colorful, fragrant flowers require insect transport.

The first pollens appearing in the spring in the Northeast are **tree pollens**. They begin to appear in mid-March and are present into June. Maple, poplar, and ash are the earliest pollens beginning in April. In late April, May, and early June, birch and oak pollens are present in the air. Each tree species produces pollen differently from other species, with a variation in the intensity, duration and seasonal pattern of pollination.

In the springtime, people often notice their cars are covered with yellow pollen. This large, waxy pollen released from pine trees is not particularly problematic from an allergy standpoint. Likewise, the fuzzy seed balls seen in the air in May and June do not cause allergy problems.

Grass pollens begin to appear in late May. This season tends to peak in June and then low levels of pollen are present throughout the summer months. In the northeastern states, the majority of grass pollen comes from blue grass, orchard grass, timothy grass, and red top. At this time of year, many people will speak of having "rose fever", a term that has been passed down through the generations. Actually, the pollen of the rose is too heavy to cause symptoms, it's the grass pollen causing problems at this particular time of the year.

Ragweed pollen becomes airborne from mid-August through September, which is also hay baling season. "Hay fever" is not associated with hay but with ragweed that is pollinating in late summer and early fall. In our region, short ragweed (Ambrosia artemisiifoli) is the most common form of ragweed. Occasionally, patches of giant ragweed rising up to 10-15 feet in height (Ambrosia trifilda) can be found in this region.

Throughout the pollen season, even mild winds can carry pollen for many miles and produce high concentrations in urban areas, far from their rural and suburban sources. Air cleansing by rainfall has been found to correlate well with duration of precipitation.

What can be done to help with pollen allergy symptoms?
Utilizing air conditioning can markedly cut down on the amount of pollen in room air, as well as, the car. Over-the-counter antihistamines can be helpful, however, they may cause drowsiness. There are several non-sedating antihistamines available by prescription. There are anti-inflammatory nasal sprays; an antihistamine nasal spray, decongestant products, and eye drop preparations that can help alleviate symptoms. Allergy shots can be very helpful in reducing sensitivity to pollen.

SOME DO'S AND DON'T FOR POLLEN SENSITIVE INDIVIDUALS

1. During the pollen season keep all windows in your home and car closed. This is particularly useful during the night hours to prevent pollens or molds from drifting into your home. Instead, use air conditioning, which cools, cleans and dries the air. Avoid the use of fans, which will increase the amount of airborne pollen and result in increased symptoms.
2. HEPA air cleaners may be helpful when air conditioning is unavailable.
3. Stay indoors on high pollen days and especially on windy days. Avoid early morning activity when pollens are usually emitted (between 5am – 10am). We have a pollen hotline that you may utilize

which will give you a daily update on pollen counts. Our phone # is 434-1456. We also post pollen counts each weekday on our web site.

4. When vacationing during the height of the pollen season, choose places such as the beach or seacoast, which are more pollen-free.
5. Remember that pollen is sticky and will adhere to your clothes and person until washed off. Showering after long exposure and rinsing your hair before going to bed to remove pollens that have accumulated during outdoor exposure is helpful. When working outdoors, wear a mask when raking leaves or mowing the lawn.
6. Take your medications prescribed by your allergist regularly, in the recommended doses. Don't take more medication than is recommended to relieve your symptoms.
7. Don't hang your clothing outside to dry. Pollens and molds will collect on them.