



# Central West Specialists

## Ear, Nose & Throat Specialist

### **ALLERGIC RHINITIS**

The term allergy refers to an over-reaction of the body's defenses to certain substances (allergens). It is very common, affecting 10% of the population and can present as dermatitis, asthma or allergic rhinitis. Rhinitis means inflammation (swelling of the nasal lining). The main chemical in the body controlling this reaction is histamine.

**NASAL ALLERGY** can be all year round (perennial), or seasonal. The main symptoms are sneezing, runny nose and blockage. Itching of the nose and eyes is usually seen in seasonal rhinitis. The main allergen in the seasonal type is pollen (trees, grasses and weeds.) This condition usually starts in childhood or adolescence, worsening over two to three seasons and then stabilizes, decreasing over the years. House dust mites, feather and house pets are common caused of perennial rhinitis.

**FOOD ALLERGY** The role of food in allergic rhinitis is difficult to define. It rarely produces nasal symptoms alone, but may occur in addition to rashes, gastric upset and other chest symptoms. Some food additives such as tartrazine and aspirin have been implicated.

**FALSE "FOOD ALLERGY"** Histamine can be released by some ingested foods, such as cheese, wine and other alcohol. This is not a true allergy.

**ASSOCIATION WITH ASTHMA** There is a strong cross association between allergic rhinitis and asthma.

**TESTS** This condition can usually be diagnosed from the symptoms and an examination alone. Skin tests or blood tests are not normally done initially but may be done if the symptoms are very severe or no response is gained by the usual treatments.

**TREATMENT** Drugs – Antihistamines: These are a help in both types of rhinitis, but especially seasonal. The main disadvantage is that some can cause sleepiness. In children they can occasionally cause excitation. Newer medications such as Teldane and Hismanal have a much reduced sedative effect. These medications have no effect on nasal obstruction. Newer medications such as Telfast, Hismanal and Claratyne have a much reduced sedative effect. In general these medications have no effect on nasal obstruction, but a new drug called Zyrtec does improve nasal obstruction. This is a significant advance in the treatment for this condition.

**DECONGESTANTS** These can be used orally (e.g. Sudafed) or in the nose. (e.g. Drixine). They can be used sparingly for up to 10 days, and are useful for clearing nasal blockage, for

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treating sinusitis and eustachian tube problem before flying. However, if used long-term they can cause a severe rebound nasal congestion.

## **ALLERGIC RHINITIS**

**TOPICAL STEROIDS** These medications are very useful in allergic rhinitis. Side effects are very few. They are also useful for nasal polyps, and other nasal conditions not necessarily allergic. In seasonal rhinitis the effect will be achieved within a day. With perennial rhinitis two to four weeks are required. The medication comes either as an aerosol or as a water-based spray. Although powerful medications, they are very safe and no studies have shown any effect on the rest of the body if used in prescribed doses.

**OTHER MEDICATIONS** Atrovent a medication for asthma sufferers can be useful in some cases in the persistent watery nose. Livostin – is a new antihistamine nasal spray. It just needs to be used as required, but it has no effect on nasal obstruction.

**ALLERGY TREATMENT** Sometimes small doses of the allergy provoking substance can cause the body to become desensitized. It seems most effective when only one allergen can be identified. However, regular medications are needed, and there is a slight risk of a severe reaction to the injected substance.

**AVOIDANCE** Knowledge of the cause of the problem may allow avoidance. In perennial rhinitis this is mainly aimed at reducing contact with house dust, feathers and house pets. The bedroom should be kept very clean, feather pillows, duvets, old rugs and furry toys should be abandoned and pets should be banned from the bedroom. If possible the mattress should have a plastic cover.