

Runny Nose and Sleep Woes



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The return of spring is a time of joy for many; we leave behind the crisp, cold weather of winter and are greeted with longer days and a promise of warmth. Buds start to appear on trees and flowers are in bloom, but as pretty as they are, trees and flowers produce pollen and for many people, pollen means seasonal allergies, or as it is frequently called hay fever.

Allergy season

The tree pollen period in spring is one of the three main allergy periods for seasonal allergy sufferers—grass pollen in mid-summer and weeds (such as ragweed) in the late summer are the other two.

Hay fever blues

Seasonal allergies, or hay fever, are an allergic condition triggered by the immune system's response to inhaled substances, frequently pollens. Inhaled allergens trigger sneezing and inflammation of the nose and of the eyes. The nose, roof of the mouth, eyes and throat begin to itch gradually or abruptly after the onset of the pollen season. Tearing, sneezing and clear, watery nasal discharge soon follow. Allergy sufferers often have headaches, irritability, daytime sleepiness, fatigue, decreased mental performance and impaired quality of life.

Runny nose

The most common symptom of seasonal allergies is a runny nose (allergic rhinitis). Recent research has suggested that daytime sleepiness in patients with allergic rhinitis can be attributed to disturbed sleep. Breathing difficulties caused by nasal congestion and obstructed nasal passageways is believed to be the main trigger of sleep disturbances. Researchers have found that by treating the allergy symptoms, in this case a runny nose, sleep improves and so does daytime sleepiness.

Antihistamines and decongestants

Antihistamine and decongestant drugs are frequently prescribed to relieve nasal congestion. Although these drugs can sometimes improve sleep and daytime fatigue, certain antihistamines have a sedative effect and will worsen fatigue and drowsiness. Ideally, a non-sedating product should be used.

Natural allergy relief

Many vitamins and supplements can ease the symptoms of a runny nose without any side effects, such as drowsiness. Vitamin C has antihistamine activity and, as a bonus, stimulates the immune system in case an allergic runny nose turns into an infection. Research has shown that quercetin, a plant compound, may inhibit histamine release from the cells of patients with allergic rhinitis. Alternating hot and cold compresses over the nasal and sinus areas (always end on cold) helps to improve circulation to those areas and thereby helps clear the nasal and sinus passages.