

# Seasonal Allergies

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**This email contains a broad overview of the different allergy medications available. The contents of this email are not intended as a recommendation for any particular medication and are not to be used as a substitute for the advice or services of medical professionals. Speak with a pharmacist or your doctor before starting any medications.**

## Over-the-Counter (OTC) Medications for Seasonal Allergies

**Antihistamines** block the action of histamine, one of the body chemicals that is responsible for the congestion, sneezing, and itching of seasonal allergies. Antihistamines can relieve itching, sneezing and runny nose, but may not be as effective for allergy-related congestion. Most of the older antihistamines (such as Benadryl) produce drowsiness, but some of the newer ones (such as Claritin and Alavert) may cause less drowsiness.

**Decongestants**, such as pseudoephedrine, help shrink the blood vessels in the nasal membranes and allow the air passages to open. Decongestants should only be used for short periods of time. Side effects can include a jittery or nervous feeling, difficulty sleeping and elevated blood pressure and pulse rate. If you have high blood pressure, you should not use decongestants. Also, decongestants can interact with many other medications you may be taking. Speak to your doctor or pharmacist for more information. Decongestants nasal sprays are also available but should only be used for three days or less. Prolonged use can make nasal congestion worse.

**Cromolyn sodium** (such as NasalCrom) is an OTC nasal spray that prevents the release of histamine. Cromolyn sodium does not typically produce serious side effects, but it is most effective when started before symptoms begin.

## Other Treatments

**Immunotherapy**, or allergy shots, may be for you if symptoms happen for most of the year or do not respond well to medicine. For more information visit [Allergy shots: Hope for long-term allergy relief](#).

**Saline nasal spray and irrigation** can help clean the nasal passages of irritants. Saline nasal sprays are available OTC. They may sting slightly. Nasal irrigation, also called nasal lavage, involves rinsing the irritants out of the nose using a squeeze bulb or neti pot and salt water. For more information, visit [Saline Nasal Sprays and Irrigation](#).

## More Information

More detailed information regarding medications for seasonal allergy symptoms can be found at [Allergy medications: Know your options](#).

## Prescription Medications for Seasonal Allergies

**Prescription antihistamines** (such as Allegra and the nasal spray Astelin) can be helpful if OTC medications don't work. Full improvement may not be noticeable until after use for about a week. Side-effects can occur depending on which antihistamine is prescribed. Speak with your doctor about specific side-effects.

**Nasal corticosteroids** are anti-inflammatory nasal sprays that help by decreasing the inflammation in the nose. They include Flonase, Rhinocort, Nasonex and Nasacort. Full improvement may not be noticeable until after use for about a week. Side-effects can occur depending on which is prescribed. Speak with your doctor about specific side-effects.

**Leukotriene modifier** Leukotrienes are immune system chemicals that can cause allergy symptoms such as excess mucus production. Montelukast (such as Singulair) blocks the action of leukotrienes. A common side-effect is headaches, but other side-effects can occur. Speak with your doctor about specific side-effects.

## A Warning

Mixing allergy medications with other medications can have hazardous effects on your health. For example, several OTC allergy products contain pain relievers, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. If you take an allergy product containing one of these analgesics as a secondary ingredient while also taking an analgesic for another purpose, you could be taking too much of the analgesic. While the side effects of excessive analgesic may be subtle and develop slowly, in some individuals, serious stomach, kidney, or liver problems could result. Always read the warnings on OTC medicines and consult with a pharmacist in order to make educated decisions about which allergy medication is right for you, particularly if you are taking other medications.

## Sinusitis and Seasonal Allergies

The sinuses are the hollow cavities behind the cheeks. Sinusitis is a painful, long-lasting inflammation of the sinuses. Sinusitis is common in the winter. Colds are the most common cause of acute sinusitis, but people with allergies are much more likely to develop sinusitis than people who do not have allergies. Symptoms of sinusitis include:

- \* Congestion
- \* Pressure in the face
- \* Headache
- \* A cough that won't go away
- \* Green or gray nasal discharge
- \* Postnasal drip
- \* Fever

If you suspect that you have sinusitis, see your doctor.

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## Sources

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, American Academy of Otolaryngology, American Lung Association, Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, Consumers Union of United States, National Institute of Health, National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Library of Medicine, Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, SDI Health, University of Medicine and Dentistry New Jersey, University of Michigan Health System, and WebMD.