



allergist

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Advice From Your Allergist on Rhinitis Diagnosis and Treatment

How is rhinitis diagnosed?

Allergists are doctors who have specialized training and experience to help you find out what is causing your rhinitis symptoms.

Symptoms of rhinitis include runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, itchy eyes, loss of smell and drainage in the back of the throat. These and other symptoms can be responses to:

- Allergic reactions
- Chemical exposures including cigarette smoke
- Infections
- Medicines
- Temperature changes
- Other triggers

What type of rhinitis do I have?

Sometimes several conditions can be present in the same person. Any of these conditions will be worsened by an illness, such as a cold. Nasal symptoms caused by more than one problem can be difficult to treat.

How is allergic rhinitis diagnosed?

Your allergist will begin by asking you questions about your lifestyle. Your answers will help pinpoint the cause of your symptoms. You'll be asked about your:

- Work and home environment
- Lifestyle habits
- Medical history
- Frequency and severity of symptoms
- Allergy medicines you have tried in the past

Your allergist may recommend skin testing. If so, a small amount of suspected allergen will be placed on or under the skin for each allergen being tested. Skin testing is the easiest, most sensitive and generally the least expensive way of making the diagnosis. Another advantage is that results are available immediately. In some cases, a special blood test may be recommended. See www.AllergyAndAsthmaRelief.org for more information.

Continued next page

How is rhinitis treated?

Once allergic rhinitis is diagnosed, treatment options include avoidance, medicine and immunotherapy (usually allergy shots).

Medicines: When avoidance measures don't control symptoms, medicines may help to reduce symptoms. They are available in many forms, including tablets, nasal sprays, eye drops and liquids. Some medicines may cause side effects, so it is best to speak to your allergist.

Immunotherapy: Allergen immunotherapy, may be recommended for persons who:

- Don't respond well to treatment with medicines
- Experience side effects from medicines
- Have allergen exposure they can't avoid
- Want a more permanent solution to their allergic problem

Immunotherapy can be very effective in controlling allergic symptoms. It can decrease the need for medicines. Certain types of allergen immunotherapy may help prevent you from developing sensitivity to new allergens. It can reduce the risk for developing asthma in patients with allergic rhinitis. Immunotherapy does not help symptoms caused by non-allergic rhinitis, although once allergy symptoms are

controlled, irritants often cause significantly fewer and less severe symptoms.

Immunotherapy helps the body build immunity (resistance) to the effects of an allergen. It reduces the intensity of symptoms caused by allergen exposure. As immunity develops, symptoms will improve, usually within a few months.

An allergy shot program consists of injections of diluted allergy extract. Shots are given frequently at increasing doses until the "maintenance dose" is reached. This is continued for a period of three to five years.

A new type of immunotherapy is available in tablets, although they are not as effective as allergy shots. Allergy tablets are available for single allergens like grass and ragweed pollen. An allergist may prescribe these and advise a pill be taken daily.

There are many ways to treat allergies. Your treatment must be based on the frequency, severity and duration of symptoms, and your allergic sensitivity. If you have more questions, you should speak to an allergist.

Get tested! Get treated! Get better!



For more information about allergy treatment, and to locate a board-certified allergist in your area, visit AllergyAndAsthmaRelief.org.

Board-certified allergists are specialists in diagnosing and treating allergies and asthma.

