

All About Allergies...

It's that time of year again! The sniffing, sneezing, spring time of year. **Here is a general list of allergens:** ❁ *Dust* (contains dust mites and finely ground particles from other allergens such as pollen, mold and animal dander) ❁ *Pollen* (trees, grasses, weeds) ❁ *Fungi* ❁ *Furry animals* (cats, dogs, guinea pigs, gerbils, rabbits, and other pets) ❁ *Latex* (rubber gloves, toys, and balloons) ❁ *Foods* such as cow's milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, soy, wheat and fish

The symptoms for allergies vary depending on what's causing the reaction and the part of the body affected. **Symptoms can include:**

- runny nose
- tearing eyes, burning or itching eyes
- red eyes
- conjunctivitis
- swollen eyes
- itching nose, mouth, throat, skin, or any other area
- wheezing
- coughing
- difficulty breathing
- hives (skin wheals)
- skin rashes
- stomach cramps
- vomiting
- diarrhea
- headache

Here are some do's and don'ts from the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology: ❁ Keep windows closed at night to prevent pollens or molds from drifting into your home. ❁ Minimize early morning activity when pollen is usually emitted. ❁ Keep your car windows closed when traveling. ❁ Try to stay indoors when the pollen count or humidity is reported to be high, and on windy days when dust and pollen are blown about. ❁ Take a vacation during the height of the pollen season to a more pollen-free area, such as the beach or sea. ❁ Take medications prescribed by your allergist/immunologist regularly and in the recommended dosage. ❁ If you have bad allergies, don't mow lawns or be around freshly cut grass. Don't rake leaves, as this also stirs up molds. ❁ Avoid hanging sheets or clothing out to dry. Pollens and molds may collect in them. ❁ Don't grow too many or overwater indoor plants if you're allergic to mold. Wet soil encourages mold growth.

Source: American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, www.aaaai.org



Fever Blisters: Find Relief

If you get a fever blister:

- Keep them clean and dry to prevent bacterial infections.
- Wash your hands often and avoid picking at the blister.
- Eat a soft, bland diet to avoid irritating the sores.
- Avoid kissing other people.
- Don't drink out of the same glass or use the same utensils as others.
- Try holding an ice cube or ice pack on the fever blister for about five minutes.
- Apply topical creams or ointments as directed by your doctor or pharmacist.

Gout: Coping with the Pain

Gout is one of the most painful forms of arthritis. It occurs when too much uric acid builds up in the body. For many people, the first attack of gout occurs in the big toe. Often, the attack wakes a person from sleep. The toe is very sore, red, warm, and swollen. Gout can cause:

- Pain
- Swelling
- Redness
- Heat
- Stiffness in joints.

You're more likely to have gout if you:

- Have family members with the disease
- Are a man
- Are overweight
- Drink too much alcohol
- Eat too many foods rich in purines, such as liver, dried bean and peas, anchovies, and gravies
- Have an enzyme defect that makes it hard for the body to break down purines
- Are exposed to lead in the environment
- Have had an organ transplant
- Use some medicines such as diuretics, aspirin, cyclosporine, or levodopa
- Take the vitamin niacin.

To treat or prevent gout, consider these tips:

- To help prevent future attacks, take the medicines your doctor prescribes. Carefully follow instructions about how much medicine to take and when to take it.
- Tell your doctor about all the medicines and vitamins you take. He or she can tell you if any of them increase your risk of hyperuricemia. Plan follow-up visits with your doctor to evaluate your progress.
- Maintain a healthy, balanced diet. Avoid foods that are high in purines and drink plenty of fluids, especially water. Fluids help remove uric acid from the body.
- Exercise regularly and maintain a healthy body weight.
- Lose weight if you're overweight, but don't go on diets designed for quick or extreme loss of weight because they increase uric acid levels in the blood.

Source: National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, www.niams.nih.gov. For more information on gout, visit <http://www.niams.nih.gov/hi/topics/gout/Gout.pdf>.

Prevent Nighttime Leg Cramps

Here are suggestions for preventing leg cramps before they happen:

- Wear good shoes during the day. Flat feet and other problems make people susceptible. Good footwear can compensate.
- Loosen the covers. Tight covers can press feet down and tighten muscles in the calf and on the bottom of the foot.
- Stretch calf muscles before bed to loosen them up.
- Drink plenty of water, especially if you're active. You need fluids to prevent dehydration, which can cause cramps.

