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ALLERGY TREATMENTS: 101

If you suffer from allergies, it's important to know which treatment is right for you:

Antihistamines relieve sneezing, itching, and runny nose, as well as hives. They come in prescriptions form or over the counter, and some cause less drowsiness. Antihistamines can be taken as pills, liquids, nasal sprays, or eye drops.

Decongestants relieve congestion and reduce nasal stuffiness by shrinking swollen membranes. Using decongestant nasal sprays for more than a few days can worsen symptoms through a "rebound" reaction, but it's OK to take decongestant pills longer. However, these pills can raise blood pressure, so people with hypertension should be careful when taking them.

Nasal corticosteroid sprays reduce inflammation that causes nasal congestion, in addition to relieving sneezing, itching, and runny nose. They can be helpful when antihistamines don't provide enough control.

Leukotriene inhibitors are prescription medicines to relieve seasonal allergies and control asthma.

Allergy shots work through regular injections of the allergen, or offending substance, in increasing doses to build up your tolerance.

What to Ask Your Doctor

- *What's causing my allergies?*
- *What's the best allergy treatment for me?*
- *What drug side effects should I watch for?*
- *How can I limit my exposure to substances that trigger my allergies?*

Did You Know?

- "Hay Fever" is a misleading term for allergic rhinitis. It doesn't cause fever. Nor does it occur only in the summer – the traditional time for gathering hay. Attacks can happen in the spring and fall, too.
- In the early summer in the north, pollens come from grasses, such as bluegrass, timothy, redtop, and orchard grass.
- Cold Symptoms last for 7 to 10 days, but allergies last as long as you're exposed to the allergy-causing substance.

