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INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Help your child beat airborne allergies this season

If your child has cold-like symptoms that never seem to go away or occur at the same time every year, she (or he) may have airborne allergies.

Airborne allergies are overreactions of the immune system to a substance carried in the air. During an allergic reaction, a person's immune system treats the substance (called an allergen) as an invader, causing symptoms to occur. These symptoms include sneezing, stuffiness, runny nose, watery eyes, dark circles under eyes, and itchy nose, mouth, throat and/or eyes.

There are two types of airborne allergies: seasonal and perennial (year-round). Seasonal airborne allergies are a response to outdoor allergens: trees, grass, weed pollen and mold spores. Perennial airborne allergies are a response to indoor allergens such as pets, mold, dust mites and cockroach droppings. Children can have seasonal allergies, perennial or both types.

If a child shows signs of an allergy, the American Academy of Pediatrics advises parents to talk with their pediatrician. The doctor may refer the child to an allergist, who can determine which substances the child is allergic to and may prescribe medications or recommend allergy shots and other treatments.

Reducing exposure to allergens also can make the child feel better.

- Keep windows closed at night and use air conditioning.
- Have the child stay indoors when pollen and mold levels are reported to be high. (Monitor local mold and pollen levels at www.aaaai.org/global/nab-pollen-counts.aspx.)
- Avoid having the child rake leaves or mow lawns.
- Have the child change clothing after being outdoors.
- Perennial allergy symptoms also can be reduced.
- If the child is allergic to dust mites, use special covers to seal pillows and mattresses.
- Wash bedding weekly in hot water and dry in a hot dryer.
- Keep humidity low by using a dehumidifier or air conditioner.
- Keep pets out of the child's bedroom or consider finding a new home for pets if a child's allergy is severe.
- Vacuum weekly using a vacuum with a HEPA filter.
- Keep your home clean and dry, especially in areas where allergens accumulate — bedding, drapes, carpet and upholstered furniture.
- Fix leaks to avoid mold.

— Hilary Rasch

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