

As spring blossoms, so do seasonal allergies

Jon Kelvey **Contact Reporter** Carroll County Times

As spring blossoms, so do allergies

The days grow warmer, the evenings lighter and plants start budding when spring is in the air. Unfortunately for some, there's a lot of pollen in the air too, and for those with seasonal allergies, that's something to sneeze at.

"As the days get warmer, plants, trees, grasses wake up, do their thing, and release pollen. If you react to the pollen, you will have allergy symptoms," said Dr. Paul Wu, medical director with Patient First in Bel Air. "The immune system mistakes the pollen as an illness-causing organism like a virus or bacteria and mounts an attack."

The immune system mounts an attack on the pollen, releasing compounds known as histamines, Wu said, which actually generate the typical symptoms: runny nose, itchy eyes and sneezing.

Depending on what a person is allergic to, the spring allergy season can last from weeks to months, according to Wu, but there are some things you can do to mitigate the misery.

One strategy, Wu said, is to minimize exposure to pollen in the first place: Keep pollen out of your home by closing windows and doors, vacuuming frequently and replacing the filters on your home's heating and cooling system. Minimize personal exposure by staying inside when pollen counts are highest — between 5 a.m. and 10 a.m. — and drive with the windows up.

Some contact with pollen is inevitable, and Wu recommends using a saline rinse to flush pollen out of your nose. Those who are experiencing symptoms can try a number of over the counter medications, he said, "Those include antihistamines — such as Zyrtec, Allegra, Claritin — and steroid nasal sprays, such as Flonase and Nasonex."

People with allergies resistant to over the counter medications should see their doctor for other medications, according to Wu.

There is a lot of overlap in symptoms between allergies and the common cold, but Wu said there are some rules of thumb for determining which it is that ails you.

"There are two common distinctions that I look for. The first is whether the patient is experiencing a fever. Fevers are common with flu and also can occur with colds, but never with allergies," he said. "The second is duration of the symptoms. Colds usually last three to seven days, while allergy symptoms can last for an entire season."

A key point for Wu is making sure people who know they suffer from seasonal allergies seek treatment early.

"If you have seasonal allergies, it would be helpful to get started on medication before symptoms start," he said. "You will suffer less."

jon.kelvey@carrollcountytimes.com

410-857-3317

twitter.com/CCT_Health

Copyright © 2016, Carroll County Times, a Baltimore Sun Media Group publication | [Privacy Policy](#)