

Allergy Season is Beginning: Here's How to Fight Back!

The spring allergy season is beginning and now is the time to get ready to fight back. Although nasal symptoms get most of the attention, allergy eye symptoms make many patients miserable, due to a condition known as allergic conjunctivitis. What is allergic conjunctivitis? The conjunctiva covers your eyeball and the inside of your eyelids. Any irritation to it can cause itching, pain and watering. Pollen is a prime candidate for causing allergic conjunctivitis and February marks the start of the highest level of tree pollens in any given year. Put tree allergens together with the normal environmental stresses and you have a perfect combination for allergic conjunctivitis.

Trees typically begin to produce pollen in late January or early February. Trees don't have to be in your immediate proximity to cause you problems; normal winds can carry pollen for miles. While over 100 trees have been shown to produce pollen, the most irritating trees in the northern California area include cypress, eucalyptus, olive, juniper, ash, oak, birch, walnut, elm, privet and cedar. In Northern California, trees usually continue to produce lots of pollen through April or May. This year, our warm sunny weather has already triggered large amounts of tree pollen. So the question is: How Do We Fight Back?

One key tactic is to **wash your hands often**. The reason is that pollen is everywhere and you can pick it up from touching any surface where pollen has landed.

For ex: Think of opening your car door and then scratching your itchy eye; you've just given yourself an extra dose of pollen. Another ex: Combing or brushing your hair will collect pollen onto your comb or brush, which can then easily spread to your eyes. Remember to rinse pollen out of your hair before you go to sleep at night; otherwise, the pollen which was in your hair will quickly be transferred onto your pillow and then into your nose and eyes.

Use saline washes or artificial tears. These commercial products can provide relief by washing the pollen out of your eyes. However, remember that any medication can have side effects.

Wear sunglasses. Pollen that is blocked from getting in your eyes by sunglass protection can't cause irritation.

Use air conditioning and close your windows, both at home and in your car. This simple action can help keep pollen away from you.

Apply cold compresses. These can be made from a bag of frozen vegetables or a wet towel that has been in the freezer for a few minutes. Using cold compresses can reduce itching and swelling when placed on your eyes. When these avoidance techniques aren't enough, talk to us about using safe allergy medications designed to help relieve your allergy eye symptoms without causing significant side effects. Remember to use allergy eye drops and/or antihistamines before you go outside, especially on windy

days or if you anticipate being in high pollen areas. If avoidance techniques and medications aren't giving you the relief you need, talk to us about whether you're a candidate to help your allergies get better with immunotherapy, administered as either allergy injections or sublingual allergy drops.

Don't let "allergy eyes" ruin your spring. Please call our office to set up an appointment so we can apply our medical knowledge to help you win the allergy battle.

Please Join Us in Welcoming Ann Vu-Nguyen as our newest Nurse Practitioner

Ann grew up in the SF Bay Area, receiving her Master's degree and Nurse Practitioner training at UCSF. She has been trained in family medicine, primary care and women's health, and has treated many patients with allergies and asthma. She has a very personal understanding of allergies and asthma as many of her relatives, including her two sons, have food allergies and asthma. Ann's professional background includes several years at the Stanford University Hospital where she provided care for patients with chronic medical conditions and helped care for liver transplant patients. She also spent 8 years as one of the primary care providers at a prominent women's health clinic. When not providing care to her patients, or spending time with her husband and children, Ann enjoys painting, reading, music and is a big fan of murder mystery movies. We're very pleased that Ann has chosen to join us in providing outstanding allergy and asthma care to our patients.