

THE ALLERGY & ASTHMA CLINIC

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NEWSLETTER

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Is Summer becoming the new Allergy Season? Tips on How to "Ease the Sneeze"

We recently came across a news interview in which ABC Medical News Medical Editor Dr. Tim Johnson spoke with Dr. John Costa, Clinical Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School. Dr. Costa noted that more and more individuals are suffering itchy, stuffy, sneezy symptoms not only in the spring time but now well into the summer months.

Global climate changes appear to be causing a shift in the typical pollen seasons, making the individual seasons last longer and the amount of pollen produced higher. Historically, pollen counts here in California have followed a fairly standard pattern. Spring is usually the time when tree pollens (such as cypress, eucalyptus, oak and pine) are the most prevalent. As we get into the later months of spring, tree pollen counts usually wane and grass pollen counts begin to dominate. For the last few years, the spring tree pollen season has started earlier and lasted longer. At the same time, grass pollen counts have been elevated the last few months—giving many allergy sufferers a one-two punch, without the chance to catch a break in between. The result? A longer, more pronounced spring pollen season, which is lasting well into the summer months, causing ongoing discomfort for many allergy sufferers without adequate protection.

The frustrating dilemma is that the spring and summer months are when we most want to be outdoors enjoying ourselves but this is also when exposure to pollens is at its highest. Fortunately, there are a number of things you can do to decrease your allergy discomfort. Here are several simple ideas to help reduce exposure:

- Avoid going out early in the morning between 5am and 10am, this is when most pollens are emitted into the air and when pollen counts are at their highest level.
- Keep windows closed in your house, especially on windy days when pollen is high.
- Roll up car windows and use your air-conditioner when you are driving.
- Your hair collects a lot of pollen during the day. To avoid getting it on your pillow, and then into your nose and eyes, wash your hair before you go to bed at night.
- Avoid hanging your laundry out to dry.
- Keep your house and particularly your basement dry; use dehumidifiers if needed.

Using medications properly can help reduce your allergy symptoms. Remember, most allergy medicines work best when taken before you have exposure, rather than after you are already experiencing allergy symptoms. However, if you suffer from allergies or asthma year after year, if your symptoms seem to last longer and/or seem to be getting worse, or if you don't want to be needing to take allergy and asthma medications to feel healthy, you should talk to us about whether you are a candidate for immunotherapy to treat your underlying allergies. Immunotherapy is the closest thing we have to a "cure". If you want to speak to us to see if this might be a good option for you, please contact our office. We are here to help you feel better and enjoy our beautiful weather.

Are you planning a summer vacation? Make sure allergies and asthma don't ruin your fun.

Summer vacation: It conjures up visions of relaxation, sports, sunny days, perhaps sand and water or mountains and woodlands. For individuals and families with asthma and allergies though, it means extra thought and preparation before "the good times roll."

As we head full tilt into summer, here is a list of some useful hints, courtesy of The Allergy and Asthma Foundation of America, to help you enjoy a healthy and fun vacation.

- Take with you a detailed list of your medications showing prescription refill number, prescribing physician and dosage. (Each medication's original label should have all the needed information.)
- Pack the needed quantities of medications and, if possible, also pack a backup quantity to avoid being caught short. Be sure to pack your medication in your carry-on luggage in case checked luggage is lost.
- Be sure to bring an emergency epinephrine injection kit if you or someone in your family has insect sting or food allergies which have caused life threatening allergic reactions.
- Include with your medications a topical hydrocortisone cream and oral antihistamine (prescription medication, if available, or an over-the-counter brand previously used with good results).
- For those prone to exercise-induced asthma, it may be a good idea to keep prescribed emergency medication with you at all times.
- If you or a family member with asthma is using a peak flow meter, be sure to bring it

along on your vacation, with the chart that is used to record the results.

- If you are using a nebulizer to deliver anti-asthma medication, it should not be left at home when going on vacation. Be sure that, if traveling abroad, you have an electrical current converter for the nebulizer. For campers and others who will be "roughing it", portable nebulizers powered off on an auto cigarette lighter receptacle are available.
- To protect against dust mites, it may be wise to pack your own allergy-proof pillow or mattress encasings.
- People with serious asthma and allergy conditions should consider wearing a medical alert-type necklace or bracelet at all times.
- Check the limitations of your medical insurance policies before leaving the country or state.
- Know your vacation destination's available medical facilities and specialists. If you take a vacation in a foreign land, you might consider contacting the International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers at (716)754-4883.
- When in hot weather, people with asthma and allergies should drink plenty of fluids.
- Avoid exposure to tobacco smoke whenever possible.
- Call ahead to order a special meal on the airplane or pack your own "safe" snacks.
- If eating out of the country where you don't speak the language, have a warning note drafted in local language that alerts wait staff to your allergy.
- Prior to beginning a lengthy auto trip to your vacation spot, take appropriate measures to rid the vehicle's ventilating and air conditioning system of mold and mildew.
- Request a hotel room that is nonsmoking and mold free.
- If you receive allergy injections, make sure to time your visits so you receive an allergy shot shortly before you go on vacation, to help keep your immune system in tip top shape.

If you have health concerns or questions that pertain to your trip, please do not hesitate to contact our office and discuss these concerns with us. We want to do everything possible to make sure your summer vacation is fun and rewarding!!!

Please be advised that in observance of 4th of July, we will be closed on Monday. We will open during our normal business hours on Saturday, July 2, from 9am-noon and on Tuesday, July 5, from 9am-7 pm.