

September: Seasonal Allergies !

Fall and Winter Allergy Season



For many people the crisp, cool weather of autumn is a welcome relief after the heat and humidity of summer. Fall is the perfect time to enjoy outdoor activities such as hiking, football, bonfires, and kids' sporting events. However, for nearly 50 million Americans, fall also means allergy season, bringing with it months of sneezing, congestion, and irritated eyes.

Although pollen counts vary from day to day as well as season to season, Dayton tends to be a hotspot for fall allergies. (In fact, in 2011 the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America ranked Dayton as #2 on a list of the top 100 U.S. cities for fall seasonal allergies!) But if you are a seasonal allergy sufferer, don't despair. Instead, learn how reduce your exposure to allergy-inducers, while still enjoying some time in the great outdoors!

The majority of fall and winter allergies come from either pollen (outdoor allergies) or dust mites (indoor allergies).

- **Pollen.** Did you know that pollen can travel hundreds of miles in the wind! The most common pollen allergy is associated with a plant called ragweed. Ragweed (which produces what is commonly known as "hay fever") is a main pollen-producer in late summer and early fall, particularly on dry, windy days.
- **Dust mites.** Sometimes staying indoors can trigger fall allergies as well. Dust mites can be a problem any time of the year, but as temperatures drop and more people turn on their furnaces, tiny dust mites (as well as their waste products) are blown around in the air. The mites themselves do not cause allergies, but the waste they produce contains a common allergen.

So what can be done if you have an allergy to one or both of the above offenders? The type of allergen involved will make a difference in the types of prevention and treatment. If you suspect you may have allergies, or you know you have allergies and are considering taking medication for it, talk to your doctor about your options. There are both over-the-counter and prescription-strength allergy medications depending on the type and severity of the allergic reaction. Before you do, remember that it's important to check with a doctor or pharmacist to make sure the allergy medication won't interfere with any other medication you may already be taking.

For pollen allergies, check the weather for daily pollen counts—a high pollen count (or a particularly dry, windy way) for your area might mean it's best to stay indoors when possible. Pollen counts tend to be highest in the early morning (from about 5:00 AM to 10:00 AM). Keep your windows closed and don't line-dry your clothing, which are two

common ways pollen can get inside. Showering and washing your hair at night before you go to bed will help keep pollen off of your bed sheets and pillows. If you want to participate in outdoor activities, there are over-the-counter antihistamine products which can help alleviate symptoms of common allergies.

For dust mite allergies, keeping your home clean and dust-free is the best form of prevention. Dust mites are so tiny they can bury themselves deep within mattresses and cushions. Cover your mattress and pillows with zippered, dust-proof covers, vacuum your mattresses (and under the bed) and pillows, and change your bed sheets and pillowcases often. Wash your bedding in hot water to kill dust mites. Vacuum air vents and ducts and wipe down with a damp cloth. Change the filters in your heating and cooling systems monthly.

These tips will help keep you more comfortable during allergy season. Here are some other sources for more detailed information on seasonal allergies:

- [Hay Fever \(Mayo Clinic\)](#)
- [Allergies \(Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America\)](#)
- [Seasonal Allergies \(Medline\)](#)

Allergy information from the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, (2005).