



Eye-vexing allergies and how to relieve them

From the northwest coast to the southern shores, common allergies can affect our eyes at different times of the year. We've got a list of common allergies – by region and season – and simple ways to protect your eyes against them.

We often associate runny noses, congestion and sneezing with seasonal allergies. However, trees, grass and weeds can also be the sites of sore eyes – causing itchiness, tearing and swelling. As many as 50 million people in the United States suffer seasonal allergies, according to estimates by the American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology. Allergies develop when your body's immune system mistakes certain environmental substances (such as pollen and mold) as invaders – and then produces antibodies, triggering an allergic reaction.

If your eyes are seeing red and you suspect allergies, here are a few steps to help prevent and relieve symptoms:

1. Check the weather: tree, grass and ragweed pollens thrive during cool nights and warm days.¹ It's true that rain washes pollen away, but counts can soar after rainfall.¹
2. When pollen and mold counts are high, stay inside and keep windows and doors closed.¹
3. Shower daily to rinse pollen from your hair and skin.²
4. Install furnace filters that can trap common allergens and replace the filters often. If your allergies are wicked, you may consider an air purifier.³

5. When you do go outdoors, try wraparound sunglasses to help shield your eyes from pollen.³
6. If you wear contact lenses, consider swapping them for frames or using disposable contacts. Longer-wearing contact lenses can gather and store airborne allergens.³
7. Eye drops can relieve mild symptoms by washing allergens away – check with your eye doctor to recommend a few brands.³
8. Try a particulate-filtering mask when mowing or doing outdoor chores. And then shower and change clothes immediately after.³

Now let's examine a few common allergy culprits by season:

Spring - Tree pollen is most prevalent in the spring, though it can begin as early as January depending on the region. In the Northwest, tree pollen season ends in early July, while in the Northeast it is worst from February to June. June is when many trees finish pollinating in the South, Southwest and Great Lakes/Midwest regions as well.⁵

Summer - Grass pollen kicks up during late spring and summer for much of the country, though in tropical areas such as Puerto Rico, grass may pollinate throughout much of the year. In the Northwest, it rages from March to November while in the Plains and Great Lakes/Midwest regions it heightens from May to July.^{6,5}

Fall - Ragweed, a common allergen, grows wild in most of the country, especially on the East Coast and in the Midwest, but can also torment eyes in the Northwest and Southwest. It releases pollen pretty much from August to November, coming to a head in many regions in early to mid-September.⁶

Winter - In southern regions and Puerto Rico, certain allergies such as tree pollen, can begin peaking as early as January. However, some of the worst winter allergies have nothing to do with plants – dust mites, pet dander and mold may especially bother eyes in the winter when we spend more time huddled indoors.⁷

Ready for relief? The good news is that, while annoying, allergy symptoms seldom pose a threat to eyesight other than blurriness. Making

an appointment with your eye doctor may help you find relief for red, itchy and swelling eyes, and an allergist can help identify the source and prescribe medication, if necessary.⁸

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