Allergies

What are allergies?
An allergy is when your body overreacts to allergens or substances that don’t cause problems for most people.

What are the symptoms?
• Runny, itchy, and/or stuffy nose
• Watery and/or itchy eyes
• Sneezing
• Pressure in the nose and cheeks
• Ear fullness and popping
• Dark circles under the eyes
• Hives

How can I prevent allergies?
The first step is to try and figure out what allergens cause problems for you and stay away from them as much as possible. Here are some tips:
• Pollen from trees, grass and weeds: Shower or bathe before bedtime to wash off pollen in your hair and on your skin. Avoid going outside during the time of year when your allergies cause the most problems, especially on dry, windy days. Keep windows and doors shut at home and in your car, and use an air conditioner or special air filters, such as HEPA and electrostatic filters.
• Mold: Remove houseplants. Frequently clean shower curtains, bathroom windows, damp walls, areas with dry rot, and indoor trash cans. In areas where mold has built up, clean with a mixture of water and chlorine bleach. Don’t carpet bathrooms or other damp rooms and use mold-proof paint instead of wallpaper. Reduce the humidity in your home to 50% or less.
• Pet dander: If your allergies to dander (skin and hair from animals) are severe, you may need to give your pets away or at least keep them outside.

What medicines can I take to help relieve symptoms?
• Antihistamines help reduce sneezing, runny nose and itchiness. Antihistamine medications that don’t cause drowsiness are available at most pharmacies without a prescription.
• Decongestants help temporarily relieve a stuffy nose. Decongestants are purchased over the counter; however, they can raise blood pressure so talk to your family doctor before using them.
• Cromolyn sodium is a nasal spray that helps keep your body from reacting to inhaled allergens. More helpful if you use it before you’re exposed, this over-the-counter medicine may take up to two to four weeks to begin working.
• Nasal steroid sprays reduce the inflammatory reaction of your nasal tissues to inhaled allergens and make your feel less congested. This prescription medicine may take a couple of weeks to start working.

• Eye drops can help itchy, watery eyes. Your doctor may suggest eye drops that contain an antihistamine/decongestant combination. These drops are available in over-the-counter and prescriptions forms.

To participate in clinical research about allergies, see information about VAPA.