Allergic Rhinitis

Allergic rhinitis is when the mucous membranes in the nose respond to allergens. Allergens are particles in the air that cause your body to have an allergic reaction. This causes you to release allergic antibodies. Through a chain of events, these eventually cause you to release histamine into the blood stream (hence the use of antihistamines). Although meant to be protective to the body, it is this release that causes your discomfort, such as frequent sneezing, congestion and an itchy runny nose.

CAUSES

The pollen allergens may come from grasses, trees, and weeds. This is seasonal allergic rhinitis, or "hay fever." Other allergens cause year-round allergic rhinitis (perennial allergic rhinitis) such as house dust mite allergen, pet dander and mold spores.

SYMPTOMS

- Nasal stuffiness (*congestion*).
- Runny, itchy nose with sneezing and tearing of the eyes.
- There is often an itching of the mouth, eyes and ears.

It cannot be cured, but it can be controlled with medications.

DIAGNOSIS

If you are unable to determine the offending allergen, skin or blood testing may find it.

TREATMENT

- Avoid the allergen.
- Medications and allergy shots (*immunotherapy*) can help.
- Hay fever may often be treated with antihistamines in pill or nasal spray forms. Antihistamines block the effects of histamine. There are over-the-counter medicines that may help with nasal congestion and swelling around the eyes. Check with your caregiver before taking or giving this medicine.

If the treatment above does not work, there are many new medications your caregiver can prescribe. Stronger medications may be used if initial measures are ineffective. Desensitizing injections can be used if medications and avoidance fails. Desensitization is when a patient is given ongoing shots until the body becomes less sensitive to the allergen. Make sure you follow up with your caregiver if problems continue.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop fever (more than 100.5°F (38.1º C).
- You develop a cough that does not stop easily (*persistent*).
- You have shortness of breath.
- You start wheezing.
- Symptoms interfere with normal daily activities.

Document Released: 09/12/2002 Document Re-Released: 01/09/2011
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.