

Spring is in the air; it's allergy season

The available options for allergy sufferers include nasal sprays and antihistamines

By Ben Romano
Higher Education Reporter

Birds chirping, bees buzzing and flowers blooming. Yes, spring is in the air. With spring comes a bunch of microscopic things called allergens that make people sneeze, sniffle and cough.

Allergy season is here. People suffering from common pollen allergies such as hay fever will start to notice itchy, watery eyes; runny, sore noses; congestion; fatigue; coughing; and post-nasal drip.

"It's like a cold that doesn't go away," said Dr. Christine Kucera, an allergist and immunologist with PeaceHealth Medical Group.

March and April are peak times for tree pollens, while May and June will be bad for people who are allergic to grasses, Kucera said.

So how do you know what you are allergic to?

"The best way to determine allergies is the skin test," she said.

The skin test involves exposing the skin to a variety of different extracts from plants, animals and other common allergens. After 20 minutes each area of skin is checked for irritation and redness, just like a mosquito bite. The doctor can tell exactly what the pa-

tient is allergic to, Kucera said. The test is available at the University Health Center.

There are many options for treatment of allergies, Kucera said. Antihistamines and steroid nasal sprays are effective preventative treatments that make the allergy season more bearable for some people. They are both available over-the-counter or by prescription. These medications are very safe; they are even prescribed to pregnant mothers, she said.

"Avoidance can decrease the need for medication," Kucera said.

Using air conditioning as much as possible will lower the amount of allergens in your home or office, she said. Also, wind and thunderstorms can stir up pollen and dust, so being outdoors after these times can increase one's exposure to allergens. These pollens are often suppressed after it has rained, she said.

For some people, a change in temperature and humidity associated with the changing seasons can result in allergy-like symptoms. There is little available treatment in these cases, Kucera said.

Many people are allergic to dust and mold. Preventative treatments for dust and mold allergies include dusting and covering your bedding with special "dust-mite covers," she said.

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