

Simple tips can help alleviate allergies

Even with high pollen counts, the suffering doesn't have to continue

By G. Jaros
Oregon Daily Emerald

With the thrill of spring comes the agony of allergies.

In the spring, summer and fall, pollen is released from trees, grasses and weeds. On its wind-borne journey to fertilize other plants, pollen finds its way into people's noses, eyes and throats, triggering allergies or hay fever. Warm, sunny days combine with breezes to trigger high pollen counts.

"We are coming into tree pollen season now," said Judy Moran, a registered nurse at Eugene's certified pollen counting station, which is part of the National Allergy Network through the American Academy of Allergy Asthma and Immunology.

Eugene's tree pollen count is considered high right now, while counts for grasses and weeds are either very low or none, Moran said.

Statistically, about 20 percent of the U.S. population suffers from pollen allergies.

Proneness to allergies is a genetically passed trait that can skip generations, and severity isn't necessarily passed, so it's hard to trace, Moran said.

"You often hear people say, 'I was never allergic until I moved to the Willamette Valley,'" Moran said. "Well, they had that allergic gene that they were born with, but it's just taken a series of exposures. And you get such a grass pollen load here."

Short of staying indoors when the pollen count is high, there is no easy way to avoid wind-borne pollen. But there are some precautions that people can take to reduce their pollen exposure.

Sharon Herbert, nurse manager of the allergy asthma clinic at the Student Health Center, suggested that people shower when they come in for the evening and change clothes and bed linens — at least the pillow cases. Pollen often sticks on hair, eyelashes, skin and clothing, Herbert said.

She also warns that pet hair is often laden with pollen, so she advises students to wash their

Tips for avoiding pollen

- Wear sunglasses or glasses instead of contacts
- Shower when you get home at the end of the day
- Wash bedding and pillowcases regularly
- Wash hands after petting furry pets
- Don't let pets sleep with you
- Damp-dust the house
- Sleep with windows closed
- Wear a pollen mask while bike riding

hands after handling their pets and not let pets sleep with them.

Sunglasses can help because they put up a physical barrier to pollen getting in the eyes. People who have hay fever and wear contacts should consider wearing their glasses for better protection, Herbert said.

As difficult as it may be, Herbert also suggested that people with hay fever limit their outdoor activity on clear, windy days.

The pollen count is highest in the early morning hours.

"If you have to ride your bike across town, wear a pollen mask," Herbert said.

Another time people come into heavy contact with pollen is when they dust the house, because pollen sticks to dust.

"People should never dust with a feather duster," Herbert said. "Damp dust."

They should also wear a pollen mask when they vacuum and then open up the area and leave for a while to let everything settle.

Relief for people with a less severe reaction to pollen can be found with an antihistamine. Histamine is one of the catalysts that causes itching and sneezing.

But for people who need something more, there are allergy shots as well as nose sprays that work on the mucous membrane. There is no single cure-all shot. Thirty years ago people were given one shot that consisted of a corticosteroid, but that only masked the symptoms and often led to long-term side effects, Herbert said.

The Student Health Center offers skin tests and treatments for allergies. Call 346-4441 for more information.

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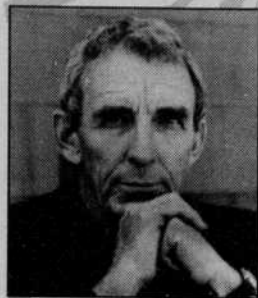
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