

## ALLERGY CARE 101

### WHAT IS AN ALLERGY?

An allergy is the body's overreactive immune response to a substance that is harmless to others. The substance that you are reacting to is called an **allergen**. Allergens float around in the air, indoors and outdoors, and are called aeroallergens. Common allergens include pollen (trees, grass and weeds), animal dander, dust mites, mold and cockroach.

If you are allergic and come into contact with an aeroallergen, your immune system will release a chemical called histamine, which causes a variety of symptoms affecting your nose, sinuses, eyes, lungs and skin.

Allergy symptoms can be mild in some people but more severe in others. Allergies can lead to miserable symptoms that affect your quality of life and contribute to missed days of school and work.

### How to Treat Airborne Allergies?

There are three basic ways to treat allergies:

- 1. Avoidance**—While you can't "live in a bubble," there are several measures you can take to reduce exposure to known allergens that are affecting you.
- 2. Medications**
  - Nasal saline—helps irrigate the nasal lining and "wash out" allergens regularly.
  - Oral antihistamines—help with runny nose, sneezing, itchiness and watery eyes.
  - Nasal medicated sprays
    - ◆ Steroid sprays—most effective treatment for nasal congestion, runny nose, postnasal drip and sneezing. These steroids do not cause the adverse effects that are common with oral steroids.
    - ◆ Antihistamine sprays—very helpful for sneezing, runny nose and itchy nose.
  - Antihistamine eyedrops
  - Decongestants—okay for short-term use, especially for nasal congestion. Not ideal for daily use due to adverse effects.
- 3. Immunotherapy**—Only treatment that helps one's immune system become less allergic; hence, it is a "curative" approach.
  - Shots—weekly to monthly shots administered in doctor's office, very small risk of systemic reactions.
  - Drops—daily dosing or "allergy drops" under the tongue self-administered at home, almost no risk of reactions.

*\*Speak to your ENT doctor or allergist about whether you are a good candidate for this therapy.*