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Allergies and the Eyes

Approximately 22 million people in the United States suffer from seasonal itchy, swollen, red eyes. Airborne allergens, such as house dust, animal dander, and mold, constantly bombard the eyes and can cause ocular allergies at any time. But when spring rolls around and the plant pollen starts flying, it seems as if almost everyone starts crying.

Seasonal allergic conjunctivitis, or hay fever, is the most common allergic eye problem. Various antihistamine and decongestant eyedrops and sprays can soothe your irritated eyes and nose.

Make every effort to avoid allergens. An allergist can help determine what you are allergic to so you can stay away from it. Staying away from outdoor pollen may be impossible, but remaining indoors in the morning when the outdoor pollen levels are highest may help control symptoms. If you are allergic to house dust, open the windows and keep household filters clean.

Applying cool compresses to the eyes helps decrease swelling and itching. Artificial tears dilute the allergens and form a protective barrier over the surface of the eye. Avoid rubbing the eyes, which makes symptoms worse.

If seasonal allergic conjunctivitis is a problem, see an ophthalmologist (Eye M.D.). Your ophthalmologist can prescribe several safe and effective anti-allergy drops. In some cases, oral medications are needed. Your ophthalmologist can also make sure that your symptoms are not being caused by a more serious problem.