

Keeping your health and wellbeing in the know

MyHealth TALK

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Courtesy of Asset Health

SPRING POLLEN STIRS UP THE PERFECT STORM

Are your sniffles, sneezes and itchy eyes bothering you more than usual? If you're one of the estimated 50 million Americans with allergies, you may need to take extra precautions this spring. Record-breaking pollen levels are making this allergy season the worst ever. It's being called 'The Perfect Storm' by Dr. Clifford W. Bassett, fellow of The American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology.

Record warmth during winter and spring produced early blossoms on trees, flowers, and plants, creating extremely potent and plentiful pollen—and pure misery for allergy sufferers. Not only did the 2012 allergy season arrive earlier, it's also expected to stick around a month longer than usual.

If you're stocking up on extra tissues and antihistamines, you may want to consider new strategies to minimize your exposure to the unkind air currents. Controlling environmental triggers and adding antioxidant-rich foods to your diet can reduce common allergy symptoms.

When you have allergies, foreign substances like pollen and ragweed (allergens) create a strong immune reaction (hypersensitivity) in your body. The reaction inflames tissues lining your nose and throat. Foods rich in antioxidants decrease inflammation and may reduce symptoms such as itchy eyes, runny nose, sneezing, wheezing, skin rashes and fatigue.

Asthma and allergies are increasing among populations globally and they are costly diseases. In a typical year, America spends more than \$20 billion on asthma and allergy healthcare and lost productivity.



Allergen Armor

- Wash pollen off your face as often as possible
- Wash eyelids with warm water and a tiny amount of baby shampoo, daily
- Wash hair frequently, shampoo in the evening to keep pillows and bedding pollen-free
- Avoid using hair gel—it's a pollen magnet
- Change bedding — especially pillow cases — weekly or more often
- Damp mop floors instead of sweeping
- Remove or wipe shoes prior to entering home
- Wipe pets down with a damp cloth before letting them inside
- Use air conditioning during spring and fall
- Wear sunglasses and wash them frequently
- Wear hats to keep pollen out of face and eyes
- Avoid working outdoors, especially on windy days
- Shower after working outdoors, or change clothing and wipe skin and hair with a damp washcloth

FOOD FIGHT!

Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables rich in antioxidants to reduce inflammation and strengthen your immune system. Foods rich in vitamins C, E, and selenium help your body fight allergies. The following foods are considered allergy warriors:

Apples (especially the peels) contain anti-inflammatory flavonoids and polyphenols

Salmon is rich in Omega-3, an anti-inflammatory with numerous health benefits

Red Grapes are high in antioxidants and resveratrol, reducing inflammation

Tomatoes are high in vitamin C, an immune booster and natural antihistamine

Think of allergens coming together in an imaginary bucket inside your body—when the bucket overflows, you get symptoms. The good news is that you can empty the bucket, regularly. Many allergy patients find that a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) purifier in their bedroom empties the bucket overnight, seriously relieving symptoms. Your environment and diet can add or subtract allergens. The emptier your bucket, the better you'll feel.

SPRING INTO FITNESS

Becoming and staying physically fit isn't a choice that you make on one particular day—it's a decision you make every day of your life. May is National Physical Fitness and Sports Month, the perfect time to restart any fading fitness resolutions made on New Year's Day.

If you've had a setback or lack motivation, that's no reason to give up on your goal. Instead of viewing a setback as failure, see it as a learning opportunity. Try to understand why a setback occurred and prevent it from happening again. If you hate working out at a gym, forget about it; find a new exercise routine that's fun! When you make a commitment to get physically fit, it's something you'll be working on for the rest of your life.

The path to your goal may not always be a straight one, and you can count on it being a challenge. If you consider challenges before they come, you'll be better equipped to handle them in the future. Give yourself credit for setting a goal in the first place—and revisiting it now! It's often necessary to resurrect goals to keep heading in the right direction. Write your fitness goals down and keep them in sight. Make physical fitness a priority—you can't make a better investment.

Every morning, remind yourself that regular exercise improves health more than anything else known to man. Exercise not only makes you physically fit, it freshens up your body on the inside. Remember that habits, good or bad, make you who you are. If you develop the right habits, however small, they can lead to big changes.

It may be hard to generate the same excitement you felt on January 1 when you resolved to get in shape. Remind yourself of the reasons why you set a goal in the first place. What do you want for yourself? Remember, what you decide about your fitness today has everything to do with all of your tomorrows.

TIPS TO STAY ON TRACK

- Stay optimistic
- Repeat affirmations that you can and will get physically fit
- Use a trigger (a short ritual) to condition a new exercise pattern or habit, like using deep breathing before a workout
- Try a new way of exercising, e.g., watching a video, taking a class, or learning a new sport
- Hire a personal trainer or work with one online
- Set small, realistic goals for exercising daily, weekly, and monthly
- Gain leverage for a manageable goal—give a buddy \$100 and tell him/her only to return it when you've stuck to your routine for 30 days
- Reward yourself when you stay on track
- Find a workout buddy
- Stay hydrated when exercising, especially outside in warm weather
- Wear loose-fitting clothing to aid in heat loss
- Check your heart rate often, and stick to the lower end of your target when it's outside

