

For Your Health:

Managing Allergies this Spring

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With the slightly warmer temperatures, longer days, and flowering trees, it is clear that spring is here. But along with the arrival of spring, comes the arrival of allergy season. If you are one of the one in four Americans who experiences seasonal allergies, you may have noticed that your allergies are starting earlier and lasting for longer than in the past.

You are not imagining it — researchers have found that the amount of pollen in the air has risen about 20% in the past 25 years.

This increase in pollen means an increase in allergy symptoms. Seasonal allergies typically fall into two main categories: allergic rhinitis, commonly known as hay fever, which occurs when you breathe in pollen; and allergic conjunctivitis, which happens when your eyes are exposed to pollen. Allergic rhinitis symptoms include sneezing, nasal congestion, and a runny nose. Allergic conjunctivitis, on the other hand, causes red, watery, and itchy eyes. These are the most commonly discussed symptoms, and they're often managed with medication or by making simple adjustments to your daily habits.

Although we are familiar with these usual symptoms of seasonal allergies, new studies are finding that the impacts of seasonal allergies extend to our mental health as well, and can even lead to mood disorders like anxiety and depression.

Persistent allergy symptoms like sneezing, congestion, and nasal pressure can make it difficult to get a good night's sleep. Poor sleep, in turn, affects mood, energy levels, and emotional regulation. Tension headaches caused by sinus pressure and the constant discomfort of itchy, irritated eyes can also make it hard to concentrate or complete daily tasks. When symptoms linger day after day, they take a toll—not just on the body, but on the mind.

If you're starting to notice that seasonal allergies are affecting your quality of life, it may be time to talk to a healthcare provider. A personalized treatment plan can make a real difference in how you feel day to day.

Additionally, making an extra effort to nurture your mental health during allergy season can help boost your resilience and mood. Healthy habits might include taking breaks from news and social media to reduce stress, prioritizing time to unwind and rest, connecting with others, moving your body regularly, eating healthy, and limiting alcohol intake.

These small actions can support your mental health year-round, but they're especially helpful during times when your body is under additional strain from allergies. Here are a few other things you can do to manage seasonal allergies, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control:

- Check pollen forecasts, and limit outdoor time during high levels.
- Do not touch your eyes outside and wash your hands before touching your eyes indoors.
- Change your clothes after being outdoors.
- Shower after being outside to remove pollen from your skin and hair.
- Keep windows closed during pollen season.
- Use high-efficiency filters in your home's heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system.
- Take allergy and/or asthma medicine as prescribed by your health care provider.

Spring may bring blooming trees and brighter days, but it doesn't have to come at the cost of your well-being. With the right tools and care, you can enjoy the season while protecting both your physical and mental health.

The Healthcare Consortium is a non-profit organization with a mission of improving access to healthcare and supporting the health and well-being of the residents in our rural community. The agency is located at 325 Columbia St. in Hudson. For more information: visit www.columbiahealthnet.org or call 518-822-8820.