

## Allergic rhinitis is a year round concern

When the temperature starts to warm up, so does the concern for allergies. But one condition – allergic rhinitis, commonly known as hay fever – isn't confined to March, April and May.

"It's the most common pediatric medical condition that exists," says [Luis Garcia, MD](#), a pediatrician at OSF HealthCare. That adds up to 40% of children, he says.

Dr. Garcia says allergic rhinitis describes chronic swelling of the tissue inside your nose due to an allergic reaction. It's commonly triggered by inhaling irritants like dust, pollen and bacteria through the nose. Sneezing, itchiness and a blocked or runny nose often follow.

Dr. Garcia says risk factors include a family history of allergies, being a first-born child, being male, being born in the spring or summer and a heavy exposure to antibiotics in the first year of life.

The first line of treatment for allergic rhinitis is prevention, Dr. Garcia says. How does a person avoid the irritants that cause the condition? We can't all move to climates that suit our health, he jokingly points out. So other options include:

- Close doors and windows in your home.
- Use an air purifier to remove dust from the air.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Keep your home clean, especially if you have pets.
- Watch the weather forecast. If you know a dry, dusty day is coming, stay indoors.
- Keep a journal of when your allergies are at their worst. You may be able to pick up on patterns and avoid triggers.

Dr. Garcia says a provider can usually see how severe your case is by examining you. But a blood sample or a skin prick test may be needed to determine your triggers. Treatments a doctor may recommend include:

- Flushing your nose with salt water
- Medication including antihistamines
- In more severe cases, a specialist like an ear, nose and throat doctor may try immunotherapy.

"Immunotherapy sort of helps your body switch on and switch off the immune responses," Dr. Garcia explains. "You could get it in shots or take the substance under the tongue."

When left untreated, allergic rhinitis can cause infections, polyps and sleep issues. Problems tend to compound, Dr. Garcia says. For example, when we have a stuffy nose, we can't breathe well. Then we can't sleep well. Then we suffer at school or work, increasing stress and the risk for anxiety and depression.

In other words: "We function as a whole. We always try to separate ourselves into different organs, and that's simply not true. When one part of us is not working well, there is always something else affected," Dr. Garcia says.

### Learn more

Learn more about allergies on the [OSF HealthCare website](#).