Dear Alice:

Like many others during this season, I have been suffering from allergies for the past week or so. I have the usual indications such as runny nose, sneezing, and watery eyes. I have been taking over-the-counter medicine, and it seems to work well for sneezing and runny nose. However, I often find my eyes very itchy and watery. It bothers me a lot since I need to study. But, with my irritated eyes, it is sometimes difficult to read for a long time.

Do you know of any medicine that would help me? Also, sometimes I wash my eyes with cold water when they bother me. It seems to help a little, but does not last very long. Do you recommend using eyedrops like Visine?

Signed,
Suffering from allergies

Answer

Dear Suffering from allergies,

Sorry to hear about your optical suffering! You are on the right track with cold compresses and seeking over-the-counter medications for eye allergies. Artificial tears or lubricating eye drops can provide relief from seasonal allergies, and you may want to try several different types to find the one that works best.

Seasonal allergic conjunctivitis (SAC) is otherwise known as the common seasonal allergy. Ocular (eye) allergies that accompany this seasonal affliction happen when the conjunctiva, a clear layer of skin overlying the eyes becomes irritated by a host of possible irritants, including pollen, weeds, grass, dust, and pet dander. This clear layer of skin on the eyes is the same type of skin inside the nose, which is why nasal and eye allergies often come at the same time? whatever allergen is disrupting your nose is likely to cause problems for your eyes as well.

Sufferers of seasonal eye allergies usually find relief as the seasons change. In the meantime, there are a number of different over-the-counter (OTC) and even prescription eye medications that may ameliorate your suffering. It may behoove you to try out different OTC options to see if any of them work for you, before considering prescription eye medications.

Over-the-counter eye medications for allergies include:
- Antihistamine eye drops with active ingredient naphazoline
- Decongestant or combination decongestant-antihistamine eye drops with active ingredient tetrahydrozoline

Many over-the-counter eye drops must be used several times a day in order to alleviate symptoms of seasonal allergies. Prescription-strength medications may more powerfully alleviate itchy, watery eyes.

Prescription eye medications for allergies include:

- Corticosteroid eye drops with active ingredients dexamethasone, fluorometholone, and prednisolone
- Antihistamine eye drops with active ingredients emedastine and olopatadine
- Mast cell stabilizer eye drops with active ingredients cromolyn sodium, iodoxamide, pemirolast, and nedocromil

In conjunction with experimenting with OTC medications and/or seeking prescription options, there are several steps you can take in your home that may help prevent allergies from worsening, despite what is blooming outside. Some of these tips may pertain more to those suffering from indoor allergens like dander or mites, but because eyes are such a sensitive organ, you may find these adjustments helpful to you too:

- Reduce clutter wherever possible that can collect dust, like excess bedding or draperies and household knickknacks.
- Clean regularly and thoroughly to remove dust that may irritate the eyes.
- Use allergen filters in your AC and heating units if possible.
- Try to keep outdoor allergens outside and away from your eyes ? keep windows and door closed and make sure they are properly insulated.

If these tips aren't producing healthy-eye results and OTC solutions just aren't working, you may want to talk with your health provider about the prescription options outlined above.

Best of luck in seeking optimal optical relief!

Alice!

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