

Spring Showers Bring Flowers - and Stuffy Noses to Millions of Seasonal Allergy Sufferers

After a brutal winter, many Americans are reveling in the warm weather that allows them to work and play outdoors. But for approximately 50 million people nationwide who suffer from allergic rhinitis, or “hay fever,” spring heralds sneezing, stuffiness and itchy noses, eyes and mouths, according to the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI).

Just ask Alicia Bultman, an Assurant employee who was 12 when she first experienced allergies so severe she received allergy shots for five years.

Today, she uses generic pills and nasal spray to keep symptoms at bay. “For me, allergy season usually begins when plants are blooming and ends at the first frost,” she said. “I get itchy eyes, and my eyes are swollen. I feel ‘nasal-y’ when I try to talk, and I have to frequently blow my nose. It’s hard to communicate clearly.”

After having allergies for more than half her life, Bultman has some advice for fellow sufferers.

“You can’t treat it one day and skip the next if you feel fine. With seasonal allergies, you need to stay on (medication) continuously so you don’t experience symptoms,” she said.

Bultman first realized she had a variety of allergies at age 12, when a carefree family vacation in Florida turned into panic. The group had merely entered a seafood restaurant when, Bultman said, “My eyes were swelling, I was sneezing, and I couldn’t catch my breath.”

She was having a reaction to shellfish - even though she hadn’t eaten anything. Simply being exposed to the air was enough to trigger the allergy.

“We immediately went to a drug store and talked to a pharmacist and I got some allergy medication,” she recalled. After returning home, testing determined Bultman not only was allergic to shellfish, grapefruit and tree nuts, but she had seasonal allergies.

Bultman says her son, mother and sister also have had problems with seasonal allergies, which are fairly common. According to the ACAAI:

- Nasal allergies affect about 50 million people the U.S. and the number continues to grow.
- Within the past year, almost 17 million adults and 6.7 million children have been diagnosed with hay fever.
- Allergic rhinitis resulted in more than 13.4 million visits to doctor offices, outpatient and emergency departments.

To see if you or someone you love may have allergies, get more information about triggers, symptoms and treatments at the ACAAI website, AllergyAndAsthmaRelief.org, which includes an online allergy symptom test.



© iStock.com/Photodjo

Approximately 50 million Americans suffer from nasal allergies.