POLLEN ALLERGY

- Allergies occur in people who are more sensitive than “normal” people to innocent substances in their environment.
- The substances in the environment that cause the symptoms are allergens.
- Allergens are substances to which you are allergic. Many things in the environment can be allergens—some indoors, some outdoors, and some taken in as foods or medicines.
- Allergens differ from patient to patient. There is no “one size fits all” list of allergens! Your symptoms may be caused by your specific allergy triggers. To find out what triggers your symptoms, your doctor needs to find out where and when the symptoms are worst, and then do skin or blood tests to look for “the allergy antibody”, called IgE. (See what is an allergy)
- Pollen allergy occurs when someone who is prone to developing allergy has a hypersensitivity reaction to pollens from grasses, trees, flowers or weeds.

WHAT IS POLLEN?

- Pollen is a very fine powder that comes from trees, grasses, flowers and weeds.
- Winds and birds carry pollen from tree to tree to fertilise them.
- Plants with brightly colored flowers and sweet smells hardly ever cause allergy symptoms. That’s because insects and birds carry the pollen from these plants rather than wind. The pollen from these plants is very large and doesn’t spread in the air as easily as the pollen of plain-looking wind pollinated plants.
- Different plants are found in different parts of South Africa, in coastal and inland areas and in urban and rural areas.
- Grasses that cause pollen allergy include Bermuda, Rye and Wild Oat grass.
- Trees that cause pollen allergy include Plane, Oak and Cypress.
- Weeds that cause pollen allergy include Plantain and Daisy (Cosmos).
- Each plant has a specific time of year when it produces pollen.
- Pollen allergy causes hay fever (see allergic rhinitis) and can bring on asthma attacks.

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**DIAGNOSIS**

To find out what triggers your symptoms, your doctor needs to find out where and when the symptoms are worst. Some grasses have pollen seasons that can last many months, some trees have very short pollen seasons. She/he will then do skin or blood tests to look for “the allergy antibody”, called IgE.

**MANAGEMENT**

- Avoiding pollen is difficult, but reducing exposure is the first step to reducing symptoms from pollen allergy.
- The symptoms of the specific problem can be treated with medication.
- Immunotherapy is available against pollens using both injection and swallowed vaccines. (See brochure on immunotherapy)

**ALLERGEN AVOIDANCE**

- This is the ideal therapy, which will reduce the need for long-term medication.
- Stay indoors until after midday (if possible) to reduce your exposure to pollen, particularly in the pollen season and on windy days
- Try to avoid going out on windy days or after thunderstorms
- Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes
- Do not mow the grass and stay inside when it is being mown. If mowing is unavoidable, wear a mask or consider taking a non-drowsy antihistamine if your doctor has suggested this
- Consider planting a low allergen garden around the home
- Keep windows closed both at home and particularly when in your car (and where possible use recirculating air conditioning in your car)
- Do not picnic in parks or in the country during the pollen season
- Try to plan your holidays out of the pollen season or holiday at the seaside
- If you are sensitive to particular weeds or trees that are outside your bedroom window, have them removed
- If landscaping at home, research plants less likely to trigger allergic rhinitis or asthma.
- Shower when you arrive home and rinse your eyes frequently with water
- Carry a supply of tissues

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