



October 17, 2009 – Grand Rapids, MI

Indoor Allergy Season

Many of us think that when the first frost hits and it's too cold to be outdoors, our allergy troubles are over. Hah! I say again, hah! For some people, it's just starting or it just never ends. Paula asked the nurse who gives her allergy shots whether this fall was particularly bad for people with allergies; she confirmed it was, at least here in West Michigan. It won't get any easier once we move indoors for the winter. Here are some tips for helping you deal with indoor allergies. It's part of next week's *Straight Talk on Health*, so make sure you listen on FM in Grand Rapids or over the Internet throughout the world.

Ducts

If you haven't had your home's heating and cooling ducts cleaned in the past few years, it may be wise to do it before winter. We've just scheduled our cleaning for the first time since we've been in the house—almost nine years. I'll bet some of you have been in your house for ten years or more and haven't had them cleaned, and that's a long time for dust to build up. It's even worse if you have pets. I'm not saying it's inexpensive but if you have allergies, the first time you turn on the heat, that dust and who knows what else will start being blown through the house. You'll know it just like we did.

Filters

Change the filter on your furnace regularly, especially in the winter. We change ours once a month. I've let it go too long and as the filter fills up, the fan can pull so hard that it seems like the filter will fold up and get sucked into the furnace. Filters aren't that expensive, and it's one way to keep the air cleaner. Our furnace guy says buying the cheap kind and changing them more often is more effective than buying expensive filters you hesitate to change.

If you have severe allergies, it may also be time to get an air purifier. Get one that's certified to contain a High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filter so you can get the most benefit. I would keep it in the room that you spend the most amount of time in. In that we sleep more than anything else, the bedroom might be the right spot for you.

Nasal Rinse

Using a nasal rinse might also benefit your indoor allergies this season. Technically called nasal lavage, it's a saline rinse. Saline is a very weak salt solution. It adds moisture to the sinuses but more importantly, rinses away any pollen that may be causing you distress as well as much of the mucus that's making it hard to breathe. It's especially helpful when you have a cold.

Supplements

A strong immune system can help you withstand allergy season. This may sound like what I said in the Research Update **Flu Season: Reducing Your Risk** on my website, and it is. Make sure you take a broad-spectrum probiotic every day to keep your digestive system working well and your immune system in peak condition.

I would also use additional Vitamin C, garlic extract, and echinacea on a regular basis throughout the indoor allergy season: 500 to 1,000 mg vitamin C, 500 mg echinacea, and 300 mg garlic should provide just the advantage your immune system needs for fall. Many people are concerned with using echinacea for an extended period because they hear they shouldn't—but if your immune system is compromised, you need it, so that doesn't apply in this case. However, if you feel you don't need it, don't take it.

If all else fails, use an over-the-counter antihistamine just such as you would in the summer. I've been there. As much as I would prefer not to take a medication, I also want to be able to read without my eyes watering and my nose running. You may have to try several brands to find one that doesn't put you to sleep during the day or keep you awake at night.

The Bottom Line

Indoor allergies can make you miserable unless you take action, so try the tips in this message to get ready for the indoor allergy season. And remember, on Sunday, October 25, I'll talk about more ways you can get ready for the winter so listen in live via radio or the Internet.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet



WGUVU Straight Talk on Health

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