

Allergy & Asthma Center

of Southern Oregon, PC

Kevin W. Parks, MD Ryan B. Israelsen, MD Edward M. Kerwin, MD

Tiffany R. Smith, PA-C Joann L. Reed, MSN, NP-C

Appointments (541) 858-1003 Fax (541) 857-4499

Antihistamines & Nasal Sprays

Allergies trigger release of histamine which causes many allergy symptoms. In addition, histamine is important for acid production in the stomach, works in brain signaling, and has additional actions. Medications which stop the action of histamine are known as anti-histamines. The first antihistamine medications produced affect histamine even inside the brain - which caused drowsiness as well as other unwanted side effects. Over time new antihistamines were developed which last longer and do NOT affect histamine in the brain, thus they do not cause drowsiness. These second generation antihistamines are better for treating allergies and avoiding side effects.

Second generation Antihistamines

Allegra (fexofenadine), Claritin (loratadine), Clarinex (desloratadine), Zyrtec (Cetirizine), Xyzal (Levocetirizine) etc. These medications are safe to use daily and work well to decrease allergy symptoms such as itching, sneezing, hives, rashes.

Old antihistamines

Benadryl (diphenhydramine), Atarax (hydroxyzine HCL), Chlortrimeton (chlorpheniramine) etc. are old medications which were previously used to treat allergies. These medications cause drowsiness and do not last as long as the newer medications (above). These medications are not recommended but may be used, but only with caution due to side effects; drowsiness, trouble peeing, dry mouth/eyes, memory problems, confusion, etc.

Antacids (H2 blockers)

Pepcid (famotidine) and previously Zantac (Ranitidine) work to block histamine receptors of a different type than those blocked by other antihistamines (such as those discussed above). They were developed to treat stomach/duodenal ulcers and acid production. Allergists use them together with H1-antihistamines at times for added therapeutic effect against itching, hives, angioedema (swelling), etc.

Oral decongestants

Sudafed (pseudoephedrine) and other decongestants help to relieve congestion in the nose. They do not control allergies or decrease itching or hives. Unfortunately, side effects include increased blood pressure, irritability, nervousness, tremors, poor sleep, and can worsen stuffy nose when used chronically. These are not recommended for regular use, but may be helpful for short periods.

Medford

Principle Office
3860 Crater Lake Ave. Suite A
Medford, OR 97504

Ashland

Satellite Office
2262 Ashland Street
Ashland, OR 97520

Grants Pass

Satellite Office
1722 Williams Hwy
Grants Pass, OR 97527

Klamath Falls

Satellite Office
2628 Clover Street
Klamath Falls, OR 97603

Roseburg

Satellite Office
1813 W Harvard Avenue Suite 241
Roseburg, OR 97471

Nasal sprays

Most allergy symptoms are concentrated near sinus cavities (hollow spaces in bone surrounding the nose, eyes, cheeks) which are connected to ears, eyes, and your nose. Nasal sprays are some of the most effective allergy medications to treat symptoms of allergies in the nose, sinuses, eyes, and even ears. Side effects are usually limited to areas around the sinuses; these medications have almost no effect elsewhere in the body.

Steroid Nasal sprays

Flonase (Fluticasone), Nasacort (Triamcinolone), Rhinocort (Budesonide), Nasonex (Mometasone), etc are over the counter nasal sprays, each containing a small dose of steroid. Steroids are potent anti-inflammatory medications which decrease inflammation and irritation in the nose. This leads to decreased congestion, itching, mucus production, sneezing, etc. The small amount of medication is almost entirely used up in the nose and does not affect the rest of the body. These should be sprayed back in the nose (toward the ear) and can work better when used at night. Some people can develop bloody noses when using these sprays, if this occurs please stop or talk with your provider.

Kids - 1 spray/nostril once per day

Adults - 1 or 2 sprays/nostril daily

Azelastine

Azelastine is an antihistamine nasal spray with a bitter taste. This spray can be used in addition to the steroid nasal sprays above, or used alone. It is beneficial for allergic symptoms and can even help those who do not have allergies. It's bitter taste and antihistamine effect can decrease sneezing, stuffy nose, and mucus production. It is safe to use twice per day; 1 or 2 sprays in each nostril.

Ipratropium

Ipratropium is an "anticholinergic" medication. This helps to dry up any secretions/mucus. This works well to stop a constant drippy nose and can be used multiple times per day. It can be very drying and may cause irritation in the nose. This is safe to use with other nose sprays and has been shown to help in persons with or without allergies. Side effects can include dry mouth and/or eyes.

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