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ALLERGIC RHINITIS:

With the spring weather rapidly approaching, allergy season won't be far behind. Allergic rhinitis, or seasonal allergies is caused by inflammation of the membranes in your nasal passages, in response to the inhalation of various irritants. These irritants can be dust, pollen, mold, or pet dander. While everyone responds differently to these irritants, sensitized individuals may experience nasal congestion, sneezing, runny nose, and itchy watery eyes. Many allergy sufferers may not even be aware that they have allergies, mistaking their symptoms for a prolonged case of the common cold.

Complications:

Allergic rhinitis is not only bothersome in the short term, but can also lead to additional complications. Individuals suffering from allergic rhinitis who do not receive treatment for their symptoms may have difficulty sleeping, or getting a full nights sleep. This can lead to chronic fatigue or poor functioning throughout the day. Patients suffering from allergic rhinitis also report decreased sensation of taste and/or smell.

Individuals with untreated allergic rhinitis are more likely to be plagued with recurrent sinusitis (sinus infections), and children with chronic allergy problems are more likely to develop ear infections.

Treatment:

The primary goal in the treatment of allergies is to decrease, or prevent symptoms altogether, allowing patients to live a normal lifestyle.

As allergies are caused by external influences on your body, one could argue that you should avoid allergens altogether. This can be extremely difficult however and greatly reduces an individuals ability to maintain their lifestyle, and enjoy outdoor activities. Effort should be made however to limit exposure to known irritants. Below are some tips to help limit exposure to environmental allergens.

Animal Allergens:

- Keep pets out of bedrooms
- Keep pet from carpeted areas (limit carpet in household)
- Wash pets weekly

Dust Mites:

- Wash bedding in hot water at least once a week
- Reduce indoor humidity to less than 50%

Pollens and Mold:

- Keep windows and doors closed during allergy season
 - Use air-conditioners
- Use a vented dryer, do not hang clothes outside
- Reduce indoor humidity to less than 50%

Drug Therapy

First line treatment with over the counter (OTC) agents is an effective form of therapy for most patients. Treatment of seasonal allergies typically centers around the use of antihistamines and decongestants (both oral and nasal).

Antihistamines bind to histamine receptors without activating them, preventing histamine from binding, and inhibiting the allergic response. Some older agents such as Benadryl (Diphenhydramine) and Chlor-Trimeton (Chlorpheniramine) are considered first generation antihistamines and while they are effective in treating allergy symptoms, they can lead to a great deal of sedation. Newer, second generation antihistamines such as Claritin and Zyrtec work through the same mechanism as their first generation counterparts, however at appropriate doses should not lead to sedation. Many of these agents are now available OTC and do not require a prescription. Some antihistamines such as Allegra and Xyzal as well as nasal sprays like Astelin still require a prescription.

Decongestants such as Sudafed (pseudoephedrine-oral) or Afrin (oxymetolazone-nasal spray) cause vaso-constriction, decreasing inflammation and opening the nasal passages. Decongestants are very effective if nasal congestion accompanies your other allergy symptoms, and can be used alone or in combination with antihistamines. Decongestants are not for people with elevated blood pressure as they can have some central acting effects, raising your blood pressure.

Nasal Steroids are a newer treatment option available for the treatment of allergic rhinitis. Nasal steroids are being used more and more, due to their high level of efficacy and minimal side effects when compared to some oral medications. Nasal steroids work through many mechanisms, but ultimately decrease inflammation, leading to decreased nasal symptoms. Nasal Steroids require a prescription for purchase.

Leukotriene inhibitors such as Singulair and Accolate may be useful as daily therapy for patients with year round symptoms. However, the high cost, and lack of benefit over second generation antihistamines has lead to little use.

Check with your doctor or pharmacist to see what product may be helpful in treating your seasonal allergies.

New Product Update!

Recent Generic Approvals:

Topiramate (Topamax) - Adjunctive treatment of seizures

Recent New Drug Approvals:

LoSeasonique—84 day, low dose, continuous therapy oral contraceptive with 7 day placebo period



PROPER DISPOSAL OF UNWANTED OR EXPIRED MEDICATION

Ever wonder what to do with your old medication? Many of you may have heard it was best to flush them down the toilet, or pour them down the drain. This is NOT the case and you should avoid doing this.

Do NOT flush or pour unwanted, unused, or expired medication down the drain!

Why you shouldn't flush your drugs:

- Medication flushed down the toilet or washed down the drain will eventually end up in our water system.
 - A recent study found that over 80% of the waters tested contained low levels of pharmaceuticals
 - This is adversely affecting fish and other wild-life, leading to decreased fertility or other abnormal behavior
 - Low level, long term exposure to antibiotics can eventually lead to drug resistance bacteria

What to do with your medication:

- Return medication to an authorized collection site if available
- If a collection site is not available, dispose of medication in household trash *after* following these steps:
 - Combine medication with undesirable substance such as ashes, dirt, cat litter, or coffee grounds
 - Hide medication in an outer container such as a box or plastic container and seal with tape
 - Do not discard medication in food, to avoid any unintentional consumption from the trash by animals
- Medication with attached needles should be disposed of through a hospital-based household sharps container

For more information visit:
www.dontflushyourdrugs.net

Want to save money?

TRY HEALTH DIRECT MAIL ORDER!

Have you considered mail order for your maintenance medications? Maintenance medications are those drugs that you take on a routine basis with no anticipated change in therapy. Maintenance medications include, but are not limited to drugs to treat disease states such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and acid reflux.

Why use Mail Order?

Mail order allows you to receive your same maintenance medications delivered right to your door, while saving you money on your copays

Remember this about Health Direct, ProAct's Mail Order Pharmacy:

- You receive a 90 day supply of your medication mailed directly to your home while paying less for your copays
- Health Direct is a division of Kinney Drugs and is located in Northern New York, where a licensed New York State Pharmacist fills your prescriptions with care
 - You never need to worry about where your medication comes from, or who is filling your prescription
- Estimated delivery time for your order after being placed is 3-5days
 - We allow the filling of your prescription 3 weeks early through the mail allowing plenty of time for your order to arrive prior to you running out of medication
- Setting up an account is quick and easy
- Unlike other pharmacies, Health Direct will contact your doctor directly when you are out of refills.

Contact your benefits office, the ProAct helpdesk at 1-877-776-2285, or visit our website at www.proactrx.com and select the link for Health Direct Pharmacy to see how you

If you have any additional questions regarding your prescription plan, or any of your prescription medications, please feel free to contact our clinical department at clinicalpharmacist@proactrx.com

Contact Us!

While it is important to keep open lines of communication with your physician and local pharmacist regarding your prescriptions, we understand that the amount of information received can sometimes be overwhelming.

We would like to remind you that our clinical department is here to help! We want to see our members taking the right medication at the right cost. While not all medications have a true generic, there are often therapeutic alternatives available that could provide the same benefit, while costing you less.

Please feel free to contact our clinical department at any time for questions regarding your prescriptions, or for cost saving alternatives.

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