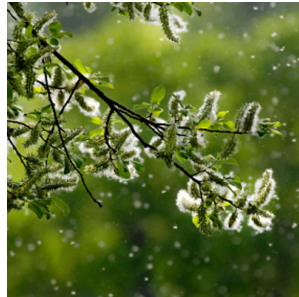




May 2013 Edition

5 Things You Didn't Know About Seasonal Allergies



More than 4 million Canadians will be sneezing and wheezing this spring from seasonal allergies. But few people really understand why. Here, the fact and fiction about seasonal allergies.

1. Pollen is the male organ of the plant.

Plants don't reproduce the same way humans do. "Sperm can only swim so far and disperse so far" says Joseph Armstrong, professor of botany at Illinois State University. This explains why seed plants distribute the whole male organism - through the air. That male organism, housed inside a tiny reproductive body called a spore, makes sperm when it lands in the right environment. The allergic reaction to the foreign protein is what irritates your nasal membranes.

2. Don't blame the roses.

"People always think of flowers as causing allergies. That's not the case," says David Rosenstreich, MD, director of the allergy and immunology division at

Montefiore Medical Center in New York City. "The plants that cause allergies have very nondescript flowers - they're trees and weeds. Those plants rely on the wind to pollinate each other. Fancy-looking flower pollens are big, heavy, and sticky so they can stick to the legs of bees. They don't blow around, and they rarely cause allergies."

3. A mild winter may prolong your allergies.

"It extends the span of the season," says Baiju Malde, MD, a Chicago allergist who teaches at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. A mild winter means trees release pollen earlier.

4. Thank the rainfall (temporarily).

Pollen cannot easily travel through the air when it's wet outside, so the rain gives you a brief reprieve. "Normally, the day after a rain storm, the pollen counts will be right back up," says Rosenstreich. But rain has a downside: It makes those stuffy nose-inducing plants thrive and grow bigger!

5. You'll often feel worse in the morning.

Pollen counts are typically higher then. Most plants release pollen in the morning, after the dew has dried and before the midday breeze. If you want to avoid pollen, don't rush outside. If you're a runner, Rosenstreich recommends exercising towards the evening.

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