

Backcountry Health

seasonal allergies can impede outdoor enjoyment



More than 35 million Americans are affected by seasonal allergies. In the spring, when molds are at their peak, trees are the primary pollen producers, followed by grass pollen season in early June. The most troublesome weeds in the Great Lakes region are ragweed and nettle when their pollen becomes airborne in late summer. Only the coming of frost will completely put an end to the pollen and outdoor mold season – until next spring.

So how do you know if you have seasonal allergies? A sore, itchy throat, frequent sneezing, a runny nose (allergic rhinitis), and red, itchy, watery eyes (allergic conjunctivitis) are the most common symptoms. Others include fatigue, headaches, facial pain or pressure and dark circles under the eyes. Allergy symptoms may range from mild to

debilitating. Left untreated, allergies may develop into more severe conditions such as asthma and sinusitis, either of which may become chronic.

If over-the-counter antihistamines don't give adequate relief, see your doctor. He or she can prescribe the appropriate medications to alleviate your symptoms or suggest other treatment options.

Since pollens and mold spores are in the air we breathe, avoiding them is impossible. But to minimize your exposure, keep windows closed and use air conditioning during pollen season. Stay indoors on windy days, use a dehumidifier to keep indoor humidity below 50 percent, and leave the jobs of raking leaves and mowing the lawn to someone else. 🌳

–Sharon Lee Maloney, R.N.