Are Allergies Making You Miserable?

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Any time you move to a new environment, there is a chance that you can start having symptoms related to allergies. Even if symptoms have never bothered you in the past, they can develop at any time -- especially when your body is exposed to new proteins called antigens.

Forty-six (46%) of WU undergraduate and graduate students reported allergy as their top health concern in the American College Health Association’s National College Health Assessment Spring 2007.

Many find the environment in St. Louis conducive to common allergies. These can be seasonal (e.g. only occur in the spring and/or fall) or they can occur year-round. Most seasonal allergies are triggered by various pollens in the air. Many year-round allergies result from dust mites, mold, and animals in the home. The main symptoms of these allergies include itchy, watery eyes; itchy, runny, or congested nose; and sneezing. If you are experiencing any or all of these symptoms, they may be related to allergies.

The most effective treatment of allergies is to avoid contact with allergens, the things in your environment that your body reacts to with the allergic response. This may not always be possible; however, you can minimize your discomfort. For example, if you suffer from seasonal allergies, you may limit your exposure to allergens by spending more time inside when the pollen counts are high and by using an air conditioner. If you suffer year-round, you may consider limiting your time with pets and eliminating items in your room or home that collect dust, such as curtains and rugs.

There are effective medications for those who suffer from allergies, including over-the-counter medications (e.g. loratidine, cetirizine, and diphenhydramine) and prescription medications. Prescription medications include pills, eye drops, and nasal sprays. Be aware that some of these medications may make you drowsy. Consult your health care provider or package instructions if you have any questions. If you are experiencing symptoms that you think might be linked to allergies and you are not sure what to do -- or cannot find anything that seems to help -- contact Student Health Services, where staff members help many students find relief from their allergy symptoms. Call 935-6666 or make an appointment online at shs.wustl.edu.