To schedule an appointment at the University of Missouri Health Care’s ENT and Allergy Center of Missouri, please call (573) 817-3000.

Spring brings budding flowers and blooming trees. But if you are one of the millions of people who have seasonal allergies, the season also brings sneezing, a runny nose, nasal congestion and other bothersome symptoms. Allergy sufferers call it “hay fever,” but health care providers know it as seasonal allergic rhinitis.

The main culprit in spring? Pollen.

Try these simple strategies from the experts at the ENT and Allergy Center of Missouri to keep your seasonal allergies under control.

Reduce your pollen exposure.

The pollen grains released by trees, grasses and weeds are very small and light, and are easily spread by wind. That is why individuals with allergies tend to suffer more on windy days.

• Stay indoors on dry, windy days and on days when the pollen counts are high between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Schedule errands and activities at other times.
• Delegate your outdoor chores, such as mowing, pulling weeds and gardening, to others who do not suffer from seasonal allergies.
• If you cannot avoid going outdoors, wear a dust mask when outside.
• Do not hang your laundry outside to dry. Pollen can stick to sheets and towels.
• Change your clothes upon coming inside from outdoors.
• Shower before bedtime to rinse pollen from your skin and hair.
• Pets can bring pollen indoors on their fur. If you have a pet who goes outdoors, wipe his fur off before he comes inside.

Know when pollen counts are high and take action.

• Go online or check your local television or radio stations for pollen counts in your area.
• Start taking antihistamines about two weeks before the pollen counts are forecast to rise.
• Close doors and windows tightly, especially at night.
• Avoid outdoor activities when the pollen counts are the highest, which is usually during early morning.

Keep your indoor air clean.

While nothing is going to keep all allergens out of your home, try to reduce them by taking these steps:

• Use air conditioning in your home and car.
• If you have forced-air heating or air conditioning in your house, use high-efficiency filters and follow regular maintenance schedules.
• Use a dehumidifier if your house is damp.
• Use a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter in your bedroom.
• Clean your floors frequently using a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter.

Meet the Mixer

Cheri Stoffer

Getting allergy shots or taking allergy drops from the ENT and Allergy Center of Missouri? It is likely that Cheri Stoffer, a medical lab technician, creates your doses. As a full-time mixer for nearly two years at the center, Stoffer meticulously mixes each vial with 25 to 30 antigens for each patient. Each vial is custom made, based on the patients’ allergies.

Before becoming a full-time mixer to meet growing demand, Stoffer assisted at various ear, nose and throat clinics at University of Missouri Health Care. She has worked at MU Health Care for seven years.

Originally from southwest Kansas, Stoffer and her family of four live in Columbia. She is training for her first half-marathon and enjoys spending time with her children, assisting with youth groups at her church, jogging and reading.

Nip your spring allergies in the bud

Simple tips to help you smell the roses — WITHOUT BEING MISERABLE — during allergy season

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Approximately one-fifth of Americans alter their diets to avoid a suspected food allergy. Because foods contain multiple proteins, it can be difficult to figure out which foods are actually bothering us. Jane Cooper, APN, a family nurse practitioner at the ENT and Allergy Center of Missouri, recommends keeping a food journal can help you think you have a food allergy?

### Read labels before eating

Once you have identified the culprit, try an elimination diet in which you do not eat the food for at least two weeks. Make sure you eliminate all the dishes or foods that contain this item. For example, if you decide to cut cow’s milk from your diet, you will need to avoid cheese, butter, yogurt and ice cream. Some processed foods also may contain cow’s milk, such as baked goods, salad dressings, cereals, meats and hot dogs. Milk products can be listed on food labels as whey, casein, buttermilk solids and sodium caseinate.

Following an elimination diet for two weeks is usually long enough to detect a food that causes an immune reaction. If you have non-immune reactions or hypersensitivity, however, you should try the elimination diet for three to four weeks.

If in doubt, please check with your allergy provider or a dietitian to make sure you are not depriving your body of important nutrients.

### Allergic or hypersensitive?

You likely know someone who avoids shrimp or peanuts because these foods cause swelling of their lips, tongue or throat. This type of reaction is an immune reaction, or IgE, and avoiding the food is the recommended treatment. Peanut and shrimp allergies do not typically improve with time. Some types of non-IgE allergies, however, can be “outgrown” or lessen during one’s lifetime, such as allergies to eggs, cow’s milk and wheat. In addition to allergies, it is possible to have food hypersensitivity. If you are hypersensitive, eating large portions of a certain food could cause gastrointestinal symptoms, such as bloating, stomach pain, diarrhea or constipation.

### Write it down

If you do not know what is causing your discomfort, keeping a food diary for two weeks can help you discover trends and which foods are helping and which foods are causing problems. Log the time it happened and how much discomfort you experienced. For example, you may record a stomachache and bloating 30 minutes after you ate corn chips and salsa. Note if the problem occurred low, medium or high discomfort, or rate the level of discomfort using a 1-to-10 rating scale, with a score of 1 being the mildest and 10 being the most severe.

### Ask the allergist

Allergy patients often come to the office during their most miserable times of the year. Of course, we want to help you feel your best and help you have little to no allergy symptoms as quickly as we can. So, why would we suggest you come to the office for testing and treatment when you have no symptoms?

First, let’s explain what causes allergy symptoms. Allergies are a result of a chain reaction that begins when your immune system tries to defend your body from what it perceives as an invader to the body. Someone who is allergic to pine trees, for example, will have an immune response when around a pine Christmas tree. They will inhale some of the particles that the immune system perceives to be bad, much like a virus or bacteria causes the body to create blood cells to fight an infection. The allergen — pine, in this case — causes the immune system to overreact and produce antibodies called immunoglobulin, which travel through the body and release chemicals, causing an allergic reaction.

Allergy therapy uses diluted amounts of the allergen that causes your reactions and teaches your body over time to not release the immunoglobulins that cause the allergic reaction.

### Top 8 offenders

Ninety percent of all allergic food reactions are caused by one of these eight foods:

- Eggs
- Fish
- Milk
- Peanuts
- Shellfish
- Soybeans
- Tree Nuts
- Wheat

Federal law requires manufacturers to list on labels all ingredients derived from these eight common allergenic foods. If you are allergic to a food not listed here, check with the product’s manufacturer to see if the food is included because it may not be apparent on the label. For example, garlic or sesame oil sometimes is listed as “spice” or “natural flavoring” on food labels.