



# Drug FAQs for Members

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Allergy Relief Medicines

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### What causes allergies?

- Allergies occur when your body's immune system overreacts to a foreign substance ("allergen") such as pollen or dust.
- Your immune system attacks the allergen by releasing a chemical called histamine that causes symptoms such as runny nose, itchy eyes, and sneezing.

### How can I tell the difference between allergies and the common cold?

- Allergies and colds share some of the same symptoms, but there are ways you can tell the difference between these two common conditions. Treatments for colds and allergies are different.
  - Colds and other types of respiratory infections are caused by viruses and often last 7 to 10 days. Allergies can persist for weeks or even longer.
  - Cold symptoms can take up to several days to develop after exposure to the virus, while allergy symptoms develop within minutes to hours after having contact with an allergen.
  - Cold symptoms may appear one at a time such as a sore throat and then sneezing, while allergy symptoms typically happen all at once.
  - Colds occur more often during the fall and winter months. Allergies can flare up any time – from spring through the fall from pollinating plants, and year-round from mold, dust, pet dander or other allergens.
  - A low fever can accompany a cold, but a fever doesn't occur with allergies.

### What can I do to help prevent allergy symptoms?

- The best thing is to know what triggers your symptoms and avoid them.
  - Stay indoors when pollen counts are high. Check your newspaper or the internet at <http://www.aaaai.org> (National Allergy Bureau) for pollen information.
  - Keep your doors and windows closed and use an air conditioner instead.
  - Keep your home thoroughly clean to reduce dust in the air.
  - Shower after coming in from outdoors, with special attention to your hair – put on fresh clothing.
  - Wash hands to remove pollens and do not rub face or eyes with hands.
  - For more information, please ask your provider for the "Avoid Your Allergy Triggers" document or visit the Health Encyclopedia in the Health and Wellness section on the Kaiser Permanente website ([www.members.kp.org](http://www.members.kp.org)).

### Which allergy medications are available without a prescription?

- Antihistamines such as loratadine (Claritin, Alavert), cetirizine (Zyrtec), and chlorpheniramine (Chlor-Trimeton) provide relief from sneezing, runny nose and itching.
- Decongestants like pseudoephedrine and phenylephrine help relieve stuffy nose and ears.
- Eye drops such as Artificial Tears, Zaditor or Opcon-A can help treat irritated, itchy eyes.
- Saline nasal sprays, such as Ocean, help moisten and cleanse nasal membranes and loosen mucus.
- The Sinus Rinse Kit can be helpful for washing thick mucus from the nose, cleansing nasal membranes, and relieving nasal dryness.
- If your allergies are not controlled with over-the-counter medications, you may wish to contact your physician for a prescription anti-inflammatory nasal spray.

## How do the prescription nasal sprays treat allergy symptoms?

- Nasal symptoms are caused when nasal passages become inflamed by the body's response to allergens.
- Prescription anti-inflammatory nasal sprays decrease the inflammation of the lining in your nose and relieve sneezing, itchy nose and congestion. They are the most effective group of medications for chronic treatment of allergy symptoms.
- Prescription nasal sprays do not work immediately and it may take you a few days to notice the benefit.
- They provide non-drowsy relief and have few side effects.
- If you also use a saline spray or sinus rinse kit, wait at least 15 minutes before using the prescription nasal spray to allow the saline to completely drain.
- For best administration when using nasal sprays, keep your head in a neutral position and point the spray away from the septum (the wall between the nostrils). Use your RIGHT hand when spraying the LEFT nostril and your LEFT hand for the RIGHT nostril. Alternate sides if you use more than one spray per nostril and rapidly but gently sniff in as you spray.

Products	Symptoms Treated				
	Rx/OTC	Throat itchy, scratchy	Nose itchy, runny	Nose stuffy, congested	Eyes itchy, watery
<b>Nasal Sprays:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fluticasone nasal spray (Flonase)</li> <li>• Flunisolide nasal spray (Nasarel)</li> <li>• Cromolyn nasal spray (Nasal crom)</li> <li>• Saline nasal spray (Ocean)</li> <li>• Sinus Rinse Kit</li> </ul>	Rx Rx OTC OTC OTC		✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓
<b>Antihistamines:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chlorpheniramine tablets, liquid (Chlor-Trimeton)</li> <li>• Loratadine tablets, liquid (Claritin)</li> <li>• Cetirizine tablets, liquid (Zyrtec)</li> </ul>	OTC OTC OTC	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓		✓ ✓ ✓
<b>Decongestants:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pseudoephedrine tablets, liquid (Sudafed)*</li> <li>• Phenylephrine tablets (Sudafed PE)</li> </ul>	OTC OTC			✓ ✓	
<b>Eye Drops:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artificial Tears</li> <li>• Naphazoline/Pheniramine (Opcon-A)</li> <li>• Ketotifen (Zaditor)</li> <li>• Nedocromil (Alocril)</li> </ul>	OTC OTC OTC Rx				✓ ✓ ✓ ✓