**You sneezing yet?**

So today was my first true day out in the open with the pollen flying! In fact, when the wind had it bursts, yellow was in the air and swear I felt it in every breath! Just how many times must I dust this week? Holy, allergy season!

Research says that some 35 million Americans suffer from upper respiratory symptoms that are allergic reactions to airborne allergens. They are commonly referred to as pollen allergies and/or hay fever.

Scientists think that people inherit a tendency to be allergic or at least there is an increased likelihood of being allergic to one or more allergens. However, they might not be allergic to the exact same kinds of allergens as the parents they inherited it from.

What is an allergy? It is a specific immunologic reaction to a normal harmless substance. There are a number of different allergens that cause these reactions; pollens, dust particles, mold spores, food, latex rubber, insect venom and medicines.

What is an allergic reaction? It’s the body’s defense against invading agents such as bacteria and viruses. The immune system seems to be immediately responding to a false alarm.

Here’s how it works. When an allergic person comes into contact with an allergen, the immune system treats the allergen as an invader and the body begins to fight it. Large amounts of specific antibodies, called immunoglobin E (or IgE), are formed to fight the invader. These IgE molecules can attach themselves to our body’s mast cells, which are tissue cells and to basophils, which are blood cells. Which is a good thing, because they are ready to fight the same invader the next time it attacks. But when this happens the body’s normal reaction is to release (and/or produce) powerful inflammatory chemicals like histamine, cytokines and leukotrienes. These are the chemicals that indirectly lead to our nose running, our eyes itching and make us sneeze.

The allergen lands on the mucous membranes lining the inside of the nose and from here a chain reaction occurs that leads the mast cells in these tissues to release histamine and other chemicals. These chemicals contract certain cells that line some small blood vessels in the nose. This makes the nose run, the nasal passages to swell and misery to occur. It’s the histamine that can cause the sneezing, itching, irritation and excess mucus production.

What are these allergens? Pollen allergies; these are released from trees, weeds and grasses. Instead of traveling to their original destinations to pollinate other trees, weeds and grasses they enter our noses and throats, triggering a type of seasonal allergic reaction.

Mold allergies; there are thousands of molds and yeast that produce a type of spore that will be released into the air to germinate during certain times of the year. These spores enter our noses and throats and will trigger the same kind of allergic reaction.

Dust mite allergy; this is a microscopic organism that lives in the dust that is found in all dwellings and workplaces. House dust is an all-encompassing name for materials such as fibers from fabrics, cotton lint, feathers, other stuffing materials, dander from cats and dogs, bacteria, mold and fungus spores, food particles, bits of plants and insects and other allergens particular to the home.

Animal allergy; come from the proteins in the saliva from our pets. These allergens become airborne when the pet licks and then the hair particle or skin cell is shed into the air.v How can we best survive these allergens and this allergy season? Avoidance is practically impossible. However, we can try to close up our homes during the times of pollination. We can do a better job at keeping the insides of our homes dust free and allergen free. Air conditioners and filters can prevent pollen and mold allergens from entering the home and car.

There are medications that can help you through these allergy times. You’ll need to discuss them with your physician. They might include using an antihistamine, a topical nasal steroid, cromolyn sodium and/or decongestants. You might even be prescribed a combination of these medications.

Like every allergy season, it will come to an end, so until then, happy sneezing!