How To Deal With Spring Eye Allergies

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The runny noses and head colds of winter are behind us, but for 15 to 20 percent of people, the change of seasons comes with its own set of unpleasantries – itchy, painful eye allergies. AZFoothills.com chatted with Dr. Roger B. Ethington, O.D., Senior Vice President of Medical Administration for Southwestern Eye Center about the causes, symptoms and remedies.

Causes

Spring is in the air and with it, airborne pollens, the most common cause of seasonal eye allergies. Other culprits include things like dust and spores but according to Ethington, pollen is behind most cases of what optometrists refer to as *seasonal allergic conjunctivitis* – a fancy term for eye allergies. The condition, also known as SAC, irritates the clear lining on the inside of the eyelid called the conjunctiva. Although the weather doesn't directly cause eye allergies, it does tend to exacerbate them. Windy days without rain can be especially brutal.

Symptoms

Typical symptoms of eye allergies include tearing reactions, swollen blood vessels, redness and puffy eyelids. But the number one complaint? Itchiness. "Sometimes, you'll get swelling on the inside [of the eye] that leads to blurred vision." says Ethington. "If it gets really [serious], it can make you sensitive to light." Whatever you do, refrain from rubbing – it'll only make things worse.

Remedies

- If you find yourself suffering, never fear. "There are a number of over-the-counter, non-prescription eye drops that work quite well," says Ethington. He recommends looking for topical antihistamine drops, which almost always include the letter "A" in the name. Examples include Naphcon A, Opcon-A and Visine-A.
- Not everyone responds to over-the-counter medication. If you need something a little stronger, your optometrist can prescribe an antihistamine, anti-inflammatory or mast cell stabilizer, depending on the severity of the symptoms.
- For those in search of a more natural cure, Ethington suggests trying an artificial tear. The drops provide thicker lubrication and are the basis of many homeopathic remedies.
- While you can't completely allergy-proof your day-to-day environment, being proactive can go a long way. Keep windows and doors tightly sealed, regularly replace the filters in your air conditioning system and turn on the recirculating air in your car to prevent pulling in pollutants from outside.