Sleep and Allergies: Tips for Better Sleep During Allergy Season

Seasonal allergies, also known as hay fever or allergic rhinitis, can disrupt your sleep in a number of ways.

April 6, 2021 By Michael Breus, PhD

The arrival of spring means the return of pleasant weather and spending more time outdoors with family, friends, and pets. But for many, the arrival of spring also means the return of seasonal allergies, and all the discomfort and misery that comes with them.

This is especially true if your allergy symptoms occur at night, causing you to lose sleep, wake up feeling tired and sluggish, and feel exhausted throughout the day. Our reactions to allergens can vary from person to person, but how exactly do allergies disrupt our sleep?

How Allergies Disrupt Sleep

Seasonal allergies, also known as hay fever or allergic rhinitis, can disrupt your sleep in a number of ways. When allergens enter our bodies, an immune response is produced to get rid of the offending allergen.

This immune response in turn produces the familiar symptoms and discomfort many have come to know during allergy season. Some symptoms created by these reactions include:

- Nasal Congestion
- Stuffy or Runny Nose
- Fatigue
- Itchy or Watery Eyes
- Sneezing or Coughing

Irritation in your nasal passages can cause coughing or sneezing, which can prevent you from falling asleep, or even wake you with a start during the night.

Nasal congestion or a stuffy nose can make it difficult to breathe while you're trying to fall asleep, resulting in snoring or a restless night. For some people, allergy symptoms may be masking an underlying sleep disorder like insomnia or obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). In fact, sleep disorders are often underreported in people with allergies, which can make these sleepless nights even

more miserable.

A very inexpensive tool that is getting very positive results for many allergy sufferers is called Sinusonic. The device's acoustic vibrations and light pressure with normal breathing may relieve your nasal congestion. The device can be used anytime for quick, non-drug relief of pressure and nasal congestion.

Now that we know how allergies can affect our sleep, let's take a look at some common causes of seasonal allergy symptoms.

Common Seasonal Allergies

Some common allergens include pollen, dust mites, mold spores, or pet dander. Different types of pollen can create symptoms throughout allergy season based on the seasons these plants are in bloom. Allergies to dust, mold, or dander can occur year-round in what's known as perennial allergic rhinitis.

Whether your allergies occur seasonally or year-round, your doctor or an allergist can determine what's triggering your symptoms by examining your medical history as well as conducting a few tests. But what if the cause of your allergies is a member of your own family, and you don't even realize it?

Pet Allergies

We all love our pets, but unfortunately they, especially cats and dogs, may also be inadvertently contributing to our allergy symptoms.

A major source of pet allergens is dander, which is made up of dead skin flakes our pets shed. Others may include saliva, urine, and even blood. These allergens, like others, can be easily circulated through the home, where they can remain on soft surfaces like carpet and furniture for months.

But don't worry, there are ways you can still enjoy your pets' companionship and affection without exacerbating your symptoms.

- Wash your hands after playing with your pet
- Bathe dogs often
- Wear a mask and rubber gloves while cleaning litter boxes
- Keep pets off furniture, and out of the bedroom of the allergic individual(s)
- Dust and vacuum often

Taking the proper precautions with your pets can go a long way towards relieving your allergy

symptoms. Thorough cleaning of bed linens, vacuuming rugs, and dusting surfaces near the bed can help reduce allergens that accumulate and trigger allergy symptoms at night. Even if you don't have pets, regular cleaning, dusting, and vacuuming will help keep indoor allergens to a minimum, helping you breathe easier.

How to Sleep Better During Allergy Season

To help reduce the number of outdoor and indoor allergens in your home and get a full night's rest, check out these simple tips.

1: Keep Doors and Windows Closed

While it's tempting to invite the nice spring air inside rather than using air conditioning, you may want to reconsider if you have allergies to pollen. Keeping doors and windows closed will keep extra allergens out of your home, and help keep your symptoms under control.

2: Shower Before Bed

A warm bath or shower washes away any lingering allergens on your body, as well as helps you unwind before bed.

3: Take Allergy Medication at Night

You'll want to check with your doctor before you do this, but taking any allergy medication at night will make sure that the medication won't wear off in the middle of the night, and will stay strong while you sleep. If you are taking an over-the-counter medication, check the ingredients to be sure it doesn't have caffeine or other stimulants that might keep you awake.

4: Reduce Nasal Congestion

If you've been reading my blog for a while, you know that if you struggle with snoring or nighttime allergies, I encourage you to decongest for better rest. I recommend trying the Sinusonic— it is one that I recommend testing for all my clients now. Sinusonic also has great videos and scientific research on their site about how and why it works.

Additionally, using a saline solution or a neti pot before bedtime can reduce the size of inflamed nasal tissue, and clear those passages, allowing you to breathe easier.

5: Adjust your Laundry Routine

If you spend a lot of time outside during allergy season, put your clothes into the wash as soon as you come inside for the day. Avoid letting your clothes dry outside— this can attract more pollen and allergens. Instead, put your clothes in the dryer to keep them allergen-free.

If you're especially concerned about allergens in your home, there are a variety of hypoallergenic sleep products available to help keep seasonal allergies in check.

Hypoallergenic Sleep Products

It can be easy to keep pesky allergens away from our sleep environments, starting with our beds. Whether you're looking for large or small solutions, here are some products that I personally recommend.

If you or your sleep partner suffer from seasonal allergies, I highly recommend using a latex mattress. Unlike fabric mattresses that can trap and hold allergens like dust and dander, latex mattresses resist the build-up of these allergens, which can help you sleep better and breathe easier.

The dense rubber materials in latex mattresses can also prevent bedbugs from inhabiting your mattress, if that is a potential concern as well.

There are a variety of hypoallergenic pillows available also— these can help provide you a restful sleep in two ways. First, they resist absorbing any dead skin cells or germs on your face, cutting down on allergens. Second, they also support your neck and head in ways that keep you comfortable at night, as well as allergy-free.

Two of my favorite hypoallergenic pillows are the Everpillow and the Purple Harmony pillow.

All that being said, hypoallergenic mattresses and pillows won't do you much good if your sheets are collecting allergens— which is why I recommend EverSheets. Eversheets are made from 100% bamboo, making them antibacterial as well as hypoallergenic.

Want to help your furry friends get good sleep while reducing allergens in your home? EverPet's latex-filled pet beds resist mold and mildew, and are durable enough to withstand activity from even the most enthusiastic pets.

Even with these changes implemented, Rome wasn't built in a day, and allergy symptoms don't tend to vanish overnight. So what can you do in the meantime if you don't have allergies, but your sleep partner does?

Sleeping with a Partner With Allergies

If your sleep partner experiences nighttime allergy symptoms, there are ways to ensure that you can get a good night's sleep as well. If your partner's symptoms cause them to snore, an easy and inexpensive option is earplugs— these are widely available at grocery stores and pharmacies.

If you prefer some pleasant ambient noise, I recommend using a white noise sound machine. Depending on what model you select, these machines can play either soothing sounds, gentle white noise, or both to help you sleep.

If you want the best of both worlds, I recommend using Bose Sleepbuds II. These aren't like regular earbuds though— these only play calming audio from Bose's Sleep app, which is designed to help you fall and stay asleep while any background noise is dampened by Bose's noise-masking technology. They are also carefully crafted to not be disruptive during sleep.

I’ve partnered with Bose because of their commitment to creating a positive, restful bedroom environment, as well as paving the way for a better night’s sleep.

Conclusion

If you or your sleep partner are still experiencing poor sleep quality even after making these changes, this could be a sign of an underlying sleep disorder like insomnia or obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). If you suspect that you or your sleep partner have a sleep disorder, it’s very important to get tested so you can see what treatment options are available for you.

To find an accredited sleep center near you, check out this tool provided by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine.

Your sleep quality, as well as your quality of life, don’t have to suffer if you have seasonal allergies. There’s plenty you can do at home to make sure you get a good night’s sleep even when allergy season is in full swing. These small changes can really add up in the best ways, potentially helping every family member sleep better at night.

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