



# Drug FAQs for Members

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Allergy Relief Medicines

Update 2010

#### What causes allergies?

- Allergies occur when your body's immune system reacts to pollen, dust mites, or other allergens (things that cause allergy).
- During an allergic reaction, chemicals, such as histamine, are released in your body and cause symptoms such as sneezing, itching, and runny or stuffy nose.

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

|                             | Allergies   | Colds   |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Causes</b>               | Pollen, dust mites, pet dander or other allergens   | Viruses   |
| <b>Symptoms</b>             | Stuffy, itchy or runny nose; sneezing (typically occurs all at the same time).<br><br>No fever. | Sore throat, cough, sneezing, stuffy or runny nose, headache, tiredness (may appear one at a time).<br>Fever is uncommon in adults (slight fever is possible), more likely in children. |
| <b>Onset of Symptoms</b>    | Within minutes to hours   | Up to several days  |
| <b>Duration of Symptoms</b> | Weeks or longer   | 7 to 10 days  |

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

- Find out what triggers your allergy symptoms and avoid these things, if possible.
  - Stay indoors when pollen counts are high. Check your newspaper or the internet at [www.aaaai.org](http://www.aaaai.org) (National Allergy Bureau) for pollen information.
  - Keep your doors and windows in your home and car closed and use an air conditioner instead.
  - Keep your home thoroughly clean to reduce dust.
  - Shower after coming in from outdoors and wash your hair – put on fresh clothing. Wash hands to remove pollens, and do not rub your face or eyes with your hands.
  - For more information, visit [kp.org/allergies](http://kp.org/allergies).

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

- **Antihistamines** such as loratadine (Claritin, Alavert), cetirizine (Zyrtec), and chlorpheniramine (Chlor-Trimeton) provide relief from sneezing, itching and runny nose.
- **Decongestants** like phenylephrine (Sudafed PE) and pseudoephedrine (Sudafed) help relieve stuffy nose and ears. Combination products that contain an antihistamine and pseudoephedrine are also available (e.g., loratadine-D, cetirizine-D, chlorpheniramine-D).
- **Eye drops** such as Artificial Tears, ketotifen (Zaditor) or Opcon-A can help treat irritated, itchy eyes.
- **The Sinus Rinse Kit** can be helpful for washing thick mucus from the nose, clearing nasal passages, and relieving nasal dryness.

If you need help selecting an over-the-counter (OTC) allergy medicine, please speak with your pharmacist. If your allergies are not controlled with OTC medications, or you prefer a prescription anti-inflammatory nasal spray, please contact your physician.

## How do the prescription anti-inflammatory nasal sprays treat allergy symptoms?

- Nasal passages inside your nose can become irritated and swollen when your body reacts to allergens. This causes allergy symptoms like sneezing and itchy, runny or stuffy nose.
- Anti-inflammatory nasal sprays, such as fluticasone (Flonase) or flunisolide (Nasarel) are the most effective group of medicines used to treat allergy symptoms. These sprays, available only by prescription, reduce the inflammation in your nose and help to relieve sneezing, and an itchy, runny or stuffy nose. They provide non-drowsy relief with few side effects.
- Anti-inflammatory nasal sprays should be used every day during the allergy season to give you the best results. Please note that when you first start using these sprays, it may take a few days or up to two weeks to gain the full benefit.
- Tips:** For best results when using an anti-inflammatory nasal spray, keep your head in a neutral (upright) position and point the spray toward the outer wall of your nose, sniff in gently but quickly as you spray. It's easy to do this if you use your RIGHT hand to spray your LEFT nostril and your LEFT hand to spray your RIGHT nostril.

| PRODUCTS   | SYMPTOMS TREATED          |                      |                           |                         |
|--|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
|  | THROAT<br>itchy, scratchy | NOSE<br>itchy, runny | NOSE<br>stuffy, congested | EYES<br>itchy, scratchy |
| Generic name (Brand Name)                          |                           |                      |                           |                         |
| <b>Antihistamines:</b>                             |                           |                      |                           |                         |
| • Chlorpheniramine tablets, liquid (ChlorTrimeton) | ✓                         | ✓                    |                           | ✓                       |
| • Loratadine tablets, liquid (Claritin, Alavert)   | ✓                         | ✓                    |                           | ✓                       |
| • Cetirizine tablets, liquid (Zyrtec)              | ✓                         | ✓                    |                           | ✓                       |
| <b>Decongestants:</b>                              |                           |                      |                           |                         |
| • Pseudoephedrine tablets, liquid (Sudafed)*       |                           |                      | ✓                         |                         |
| • Phenylephrine tablets (Sudafed PE)               |                           |                      | ✓                         |                         |
| <b>Combinations: Antihistamine + Decongestant</b>  |                           |                      |                           |                         |
| • Loratadine-D tablets (Claritin-D)*               | ✓                         | ✓                    | ✓                         | ✓                       |
| • Cetirizine-D tablets (Zyrtec-D)*                 | ✓                         | ✓                    | ✓                         | ✓                       |
| • Chlorpheniramine-D tablets (SudoGest)            | ✓                         | ✓                    | ✓                         | ✓                       |
| • Dimetapp Cold & Allergy liquid                   | ✓                         | ✓                    | ✓                         | ✓                       |
| <b>Nose Sprays</b>                                 |                           |                      |                           |                         |
| • Fluticasone nose spray (Flonase) – Rx            |                           | ✓                    | ✓                         | ✓                       |
| • Flunisolide nose spray (Nasarel) – Rx            |                           | ✓                    | ✓                         | ✓                       |
| • Saline Nose Spray (Ocean)                        |                           |                      | ✓                         |                         |
| • Cromolyn Nose Spray (Nasal crom)                 |                           | ✓                    | ✓                         |                         |
| • Sinus Rinse Kit                                  |                           |                      | ✓                         |                         |
| <b>Eye Drops</b>                                   |                           |                      |                           |                         |
| • Artificial Tears Eye Drops                       |                           |                      |                           | ✓                       |
| • Ketotifen Eye Drops (Zaditor)                    |                           |                      |                           | ✓                       |
| • Naphazoline/Pheniramine Eye Drops (Opcon-A)      |                           |                      |                           | ✓                       |

Rx = prescription required \* Please ask pharmacy staff for assistance