

Health

Athletes and Allergies

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during the morning and afternoon newscasts. Pay attention to them. They can tell you what pollen counts are high or low, so you can plan your day accordingly. Air quality reports are also helpful, because air pollution can make symptoms worse.

Work with Your Doctor

You don't have to stay inside and miss the game because you have allergies. Your doctor can help you pinpoint and prepare for the allergy seasons that impact you and prescribe the right medications that won't slow you down on the playing field. Working with your doctor is particularly important if you experience extreme allergic reactions, such as swelling of the throat, asthma or other breathing problems. Your doctor may also refer you to an ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist or allergist who specializes in advanced testing and treatment for allergies.

Allergy Testing

A specialist may have you undergo a skin test or a blood test to determine your allergies. Allergy experts continue to debate the minimum age at which they can obtain accurate results from either method of testing. The debate aside, children under the age of 2 are routinely tested using the radioallergosorbent test (RAST) which involves a simple blood draw. Though test results can occasionally yield false negatives or positives, the information is still useful to the allergy specialist to determine allergies.

Skin testing for allergies can be performed in two ways:

Injection – A small amount of an allergen is injected under the skin, usually on the arm.

Prick – A drop of an allergen is placed on the skin. The area is then pricked with a small device.

In either case, if redness and/or swelling occur within 15 minutes of exposure, an allergy is present.

The Right Treatment

Today, there are many medications in pill, nasal spray, inhaler and liquid form to help you combat your symptoms. Immunotherapy (allergy shots) may also be prescribed. Immunotherapy has the potential to virtually eliminate your allergies within seven years. However, weekly injections in your arms are necessary.

If you experience severe symptoms, such as asthma or other breathing issues, or you are highly allergic to insect venom (i.e. bee stings), your doctor may require you to keep an epinephrine pen or an inhaler filled with a quick-acting bronchodilator such as albuterol or pirbuterol on hand at all times. Also, make sure your coach is aware of any allergies you have.

Knowing what you are allergic to and the treatment that works best for you can keep you in the game and performing your best. Make an appointment with your physician or an ENT specialist to discuss your allergies. You can also visit the Health Topics section of www.wakemed.org for more information about allergies.

We love the beauty of North Carolina. But that beauty comes with a price: North Carolina is one of the worst states for airborne allergies. If you suffer from "hay fever," allergies associated with pollen from trees, grass and weeds, you may experience some or all of the following symptoms:

- Itchy, watery eyes
- Sneezing
- Runny, itchy nose
- Headache
- Congestion
- Coughing
- Fatigue

Pollen can even trigger breathing problems, even asthma-like symptoms, in people with severe allergies.

In most cases, teens who suffer from allergies - even asthma - can continue to participate in outdoor sports. The key is to be prepared. Here are a few things to keep in mind before heading outdoors.

The Season

Most people who have hay fever know that their symptoms are worse at different times of the year. The following table is a basic description of blooming seasons-also called "allergy seasons"- in North Carolina. These are the times when pollen is present in the air. Peak times are when pollen is most abundant.

Pollen	Season	Peak
Trees	February-May	April
Grasses	Throughout the year	May-August
Weeds	June-November	September

The Weather

Dry, breezy days are great for sports but not so great for people who suffer from airborne allergies. Conversely, people who are allergic to molds, usually have more trouble on rainy days.

Pollen Counts and Air Quality

Your local weatherperson often provides pollen counts