Aging Lifestyles: Overcome those pesky eye allergies

by Joe_Volz

Every spring and every autumn, regular as clockwork, my wife Kate's eyes turn red, swollen, watery and itchy. Very irritating.

Not to mention that it puts her out of action for pretty much any outdoor activity until she can get the allergies under control using anti-allergy pills.

Like many older people, Kate has developed year-round allergies as she has grown older. Until her 40s, she was allergy free. Then, for a number of years, her eyes bothered her only during the seasonal allergy months, from spring till late autumn. Now they are a year-round problem.

Johns Hopkins University's Web site on vision provides an answer to what is bothering many allergy sufferers: It's called "allergic conjunctivitis" and is described as "a common cause of red, itchy eyes. Although allergies are best known for causing nasal symptoms, they also can be irritating to the eyes.

"In allergic conjunctivitis, the affected part of the eye is the conjunctiva, the thin elastic tissue that covers the white of the eye and lines the inside of the eyelid," the Johns Hopkins site says. Reading, for example, can be painful.

At its worst, allergic conjunctivitis symptoms mock upper respiratory infections with upper body congestion and drippy eyes and nose. It also causes people to feel tired and unable to carry out their normal daily functions.

There are two ways to battle allergic conjunctivitis. You can do nothing and just wait until the season is over or you can fight it.

Here are some suggestions if you want to take the problem on:

If possible, try to avoid the pollen and irritants that bother you. This means keeping windows closed during the height of the allergy season. It also means using your air conditioner regularly even though it may not be that hot outside. Air conditioning filters out pollen from the air in your home. A dehumidifier helps some people too.

If you have cats or dogs, make sure to brush and bath them regularly. This reduces the amount of dander indoors that can irritate allergies. You also might consider keeping pets out of your bedroom altogether.

WebMD online says it's helpful to keep track of when your allergies are worst: what time of day, what you are doing and where you are. If you can narrow it down to a particular time and place, you can avoid doing your outdoors work or exercising then. Summer is a good time to work out in a gym or at the YMCA.

Control is often a balancing act for allergic conjunctivitis sufferers. Along with heeding the regimen described above, it's often necessary to take added steps.

The Johns Hopkins Web site has several suggestions. One of them is to apply cold compresses to your eyes when symptoms first appear. This helps control the reaction in the short term.

Hopkins also offers suggestions about types of medications that are specifically for allergic conjunctivitis, observing that medications are "a mainstay to control conjunctivitis." Your pharmacist can help you find the correct eye drops for you.

Here are some things to consider:

- Antihistamine eye drops to control acute redness and itching.

- Oral antihistamine medication to reduce itching.

- Vasoconstrictors for short-term treatment of redness and swelling.

- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory eye drops reduce symptoms in some people.

- Mast-cell inhibiters treat several symptoms including itching, swelling and watery eyes.

Johns Hopkins also says that doctors will prescribe corticosteroid eye drops only for severe cases and only

for a short time. That's because of the risk of side effects such as cataracts and elevated eye pressure that may lead to glaucoma.

Resources:

www.johnshopkins.edu.

www.webmd.com/allergies

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