



Timely information and solutions for effective healthcare management

Seasonal Allergic Rhinitis

Background

Allergic rhinitis is a condition that occurs when particles in the air irritate the inside of the nose.¹ These particles are also called allergens.² Some examples of allergens include mold, pollen, pet dander and dust mites.^{2,3} Allergens cause chemicals called histamine and leukotrienes to be released from cells in the body.^{4,5} These chemicals cause the symptoms of allergic rhinitis.^{4,5} The common symptoms of allergic rhinitis may include a runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, watery, or red and itchy eyes, and itchy, throat or roof of the mouth.^{1,6}

There are two types of allergic rhinitis: seasonal and perennial.^{2,4,7} Outdoor mold and pollen cause seasonal allergic rhinitis, also known as “hayfever”.^{2,4,7} It occurs in the spring, summer and fall months.⁴ Perennial allergic rhinitis is caused by pet dander, dust mites and indoor mold and occurs year-round.^{4,7} It is estimated that 40 to 50 million people in the United States have seasonal or year-round allergies.⁸

Treatment Options

There is no cure for allergic rhinitis, but there are ways to prevent and treat the symptoms.^{4,6} One way to prevent or lessen the symptoms of allergic rhinitis is to avoid allergens.^{4,6} Some ways to avoid contact with allergens include the following:^{4,6}

- Using the air conditioning instead of opening windows and doors
- Avoiding the use of attic and window fans that draw in outside air
- Using a dehumidifier to lower humidity levels
- Drying clothes in a clothes dryer instead of outside on a clothesline
- Limiting activity on days when allergen counts are high

- Bathing and changing clothes after being outside
- Wearing a facemask when mowing the lawn, raking leaves or gardening

Immunotherapy

Immunotherapy, or allergy shots, is another way to prevent or lessen the symptoms of allergic rhinitis.^{2,4,6} This method consists of injecting small amounts of allergen into the body.⁴ Many shots are given over the course of three to five years.^{2,4} Allergy shots help the body fight off the effects of allergens.^{2,4} Symptoms may be less or may go away completely.⁶ This method is helpful for 70% to 90% of people with allergic rhinitis.⁸

Medicines

Medicines are used to treat the symptoms of allergic rhinitis.^{4,5} The different types of medicines used to treat allergic rhinitis include antihistamines, nasal corticosteroids, decongestants, leukotriene modifiers, and mast cell stabilizers.^{2,4,5} These medicines are available as eye drops, liquids, tablets, and/or nasal sprays.⁴

Some medicines for allergic rhinitis are available without a prescription. Some examples include the following:⁴

- Benadryl® (diphenhydramine), an antihistamine
- Claritin® (loratadine), an antihistamine
- NasalCrom® Nasal Spray (cromolyn sodium), a mast cell stabilizer
- Sudafed® (pseudoephedrine), a decongestant

Table 1 lists selected prescription medicines indicated for the treatment of allergic rhinitis.

Antihistamines stop histamine from being released into the body.^{2,5} They help prevent a runny nose, sneezing, watery and itchy eyes, and an itchy throat or roof of the mouth.^{2,5}

Corticosteroids given as a nasal spray help relieve a runny, stuffy nose and reduce itching.^{2,5} They work by lowering the amount of irritation that allergens cause.^{2,5}

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Decongestants help to relieve “stiffness”.^{2,4,5} They work by narrowing blood vessels, causing the stiffness to drain.⁵

Leukotriene modifiers block the actions of leukotrienes, which are chemicals in the body that can cause allergy symptoms and inflammation.^{2,5} Leukotriene modifiers help relieve symptoms such as sneezing, itching and stiffness.^{2,5}

Mast cell stabilizers block the release of histamine and leukotrienes to help prevent sneezing, a stuffy, runny nose, or watery, red and itchy eyes.⁴

What's new?

Allegra-D® (fexofenadine and pseudoephedrine) has been approved in a 24-hour tablet formulation, which contains 180 mg of fexofenadine and 240 mg of pseudoephedrine and is taken once-daily.⁹ Allegra-D 12-hour contains 60 mg of fexofenadine and 120 mg of pseudoephedrine and is taken twice-daily; generic fexofenadine 60 mg/pseudoephedrine 120 mg has been approved by the FDA, but a launch date has yet to be determined due to pending litigation.⁹

Clarinet-D® 24-hour (desloratadine and pseudoephedrine) is a combination antihistamine and a decongestant in one tablet that is taken once every 24 hours.⁹ For people who need both types of medicine, the combination products offer an easier way to manage the symptoms of allergic rhinitis. Secondly, Clarinet® (desloratadine) is now available as a syrup.⁹

Finally, the makers of Nasacort® nasal spray (triamcinolone acetone) have introduced a new product called Nasacort® HFA (triamcinolone acetone).⁹ This product is the first intranasal corticosteroid approved in the United States that uses hydrofluoroalkane (HFA) rather than chemicals called chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). CFCs are harmful to the ozone.⁹ Nasacort HFA was approved in April, 2004, but is not yet available for dispensing.⁹

Caremark Clinical Initiatives

Caremark offers multiple clinical programs to address the treatment of allergic rhinitis. These programs can help plan participants and their physicians manage allergic rhinitis appropriately, safely, and cost-effectively. For details regarding available clinical programs, please contact your account representative.

Table 1: Selected Prescription Medicines Indicated for the Treatment of Allergic Rhinitis¹⁰⁻²⁴

Antihistamines

- Allegra® (fexofenadine)
- Astelin® Nasal Spray (azelastine)
- Clarinet® (desloratadine)
- Livostin® (levocabastine) eye drops†
- Patanol® (olopatadine) eye drops†
- Zaditor™ (ketotifen) eye drops†
- Zyrtec® (cetirizine)

Corticosteroids

- Beconase AQ® (beclomethasone) nasal spray
- Flonase® (fluticasone) nasal spray
- Nasacort® AQ (triamcinolone) nasal spray
- Nasacort® HFA (triamcinolone)*
- Nasonex® (mometasone) nasal spray
- Rhinocort Aqua® (budesonide) nasal spray
- Alrex™ (loteprednol) eye drops†

Leukotriene Modifiers

- Singulair® (montelukast)

Mast Cell Stabilizers

- Alocril® (nedocromil) eye drops

Antihistamine/Decongestant Combinations

- Allegra-D® 12 Hour[‡] (fexofenadine and pseudoephedrine)
- Allegra-D® 24 Hour (fexofenadine and pseudoephedrine)
- Clarinet-D® (desloratadine and pseudoephedrine) 24-Hour
- Zyrtec-D 12 Hour® (cetirizine and pseudoephedrine)

Bolded medicines are currently on the Caremark Primary/Preferred and Performance Drug Lists.

* FDA-approved April 7, 2004, but not yet available for dispensing.

† This product is listed on the Caremark Primary/Preferred Drug List, but not the Performance Drug List.

‡ Generic fexofenadine 60 mg/ pseudoephedrine 120 mg has been approved by the FDA, but a launch date has not yet been determined.

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