

# THREE STEPS TO RELIEVE & FIX ALLERGIES



Having allergies is no fun. In fact, it can be downright miserable. At Dakota Allergy & Asthma, we want to help you find relief! But before jumping into allergy treatment, we first have to determine the problem and the best path of action.

We recommend a three-step process for our patients.

## STEP 1

### IS IT REALLY ALLERGY?

Oftentimes, the symptoms associated with allergies, the common cold, and sinus issues are similar. However, there are some distinct differences that can help you determine the true cause of your discomfort.

Allergies cause runny, congested noses; red, watering eyes; itching; and sneezing. On the other hand, fevers or headaches are not caused by allergies.

In the Midwest, spring is typically the beginning of outdoor allergy season. Tree pollens are responsible for allergy symptoms beginning in April and May, while grass pollen appears in late May, hitting a peak in June and July. Mold spores also arrive in the spring and worsen through the summer.

Beginning in July, weeds are a common culprit for allergy symptoms. Weed allergens are at their height in August and September.

Unfortunately, these troublesome outdoor allergens remain in the environment until late fall, when the first freeze hits. Mold spores can linger even longer, until the first snow.

Your indoor environment can also trigger allergies. Symptoms of animal allergies typically arise soon after exposure. Dust mites are another common allergen. Living with pets and dust mites can cause allergy sufferers steady, daily problems if they go untreated.

### WHAT ELSE COULD IT BE?

Cold or sinus infection symptoms can mimic allergies. However, these ailments generally lack the itch symptoms that come from allergies. Additionally, a cold or sinus infection usually only lasts a week or two, while allergy symptoms are on-going.

Though a deviated septum and other structural issues give non-stop congestion, these issues do not cause the itching that

is associated with allergies. Nasal polyps can also cause a long-term plugged nose. Loss of smell is a tell-tell sign of nasal polyps.

Other causes of allergy-type symptoms are chronic non-allergic sinusitis, foreign bodies, tumors, and the use of certain medications.

The most common “look alike” to allergies is vasomotor rhinitis. This condition leads to sneezing and a runny, stuffy nose. For many people, the major triggers are irritants such as fumes, smoke, dust, fresh newsprint, or alcoholic beverages. However, for a portion of those who suffer from vasomotor rhinitis, there isn’t a clear reason or obvious trigger.

## STEP 2

### SELF HELP BEFORE SEEING THE ALLERGIST

Avoiding your triggers is the best start to the self-help process. The recommendations below can be easily done yourself and will help decrease your allergy symptoms.

If your symptoms fit within the pollen or mold seasons, keep the doors and window of your home, office and car closed. Use the air conditioning system instead.

To minimize pet allergies, keep the pet out of the house and do a deep cleaning of your home. If the pet must stay indoors, keeping it out of the bedroom can help.

Dust mites are difficult to completely eradicate from your home, therefore, a combination of changes are necessary. Keeping the indoor humidity low (40-50%), replacing carpet and upholstery with smooth floors and furniture, and using bed and pillow encasements will drastically reduce the number of dust mites.

It is also necessary to wash all bedding weekly.

Most interventional treatments for allergies are over-the-counter medications. If used correctly, these medications can do an outstanding job alleviating your allergy symptoms.

Over-the-counter antihistamine medications decrease the itchy, sneezy, and runny symptoms. These medications begin to work approximately thirty to sixty minutes after taking them. Numerous antihistamines are available at local drugstores. The non-drowsy options are best because they allow you to continue with your regular activities. These medicines include fexofenadine and loratadine. Cetirizine may be listed as non-drowsy, however, may cause you to feel a little tired. Eye drops, such as ketotifen, can relieve itchy, watery eyes, and adding a decongestant to your regimen can help the nasal congestion. These over-the-counter medications only help relieve symptoms on the days they are taken.

Topical nasal steroids are the most effective medicine to relieve allergy symptoms. These nasal sprays combat the congestion as well as your itching, sneezing, and runny nose. To maximize the benefit of this at-home treatment, you must start using the medication before your symptoms get bad. Then, continue using the nose spray every day throughout the allergy season. You can also use antihistamines and decongestants



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## SEEK AN ALLERGIST'S HELP

If your at-home treatments can't adequately control your symptoms, seeing an allergist is the next step to finding relief.

## YOUR VISIT WITH AN ALLERGIST WILL FOLLOW THESE STEPS:

1. Officially diagnosing allergies through allergy testing
2. Discussing your past avoidance and medication programs
3. See if allergy shots (immunotherapy) could be right for you and your symptoms

If it is determined that allergies are not the reason for your symptoms, Dakota Allergy & Asthma will work to help you find an appropriate specialist who can help you with your needs.

## ALLERGY TESTING

Most allergy testing is done directly on the skin. A drop of an allergy-producing substance (allergen) is applied to the skin. If you have allergy antibody (IgE) against the applied allergen, a spot that resembles a mosquito bite will appear within approximately 15 minutes. Intradermal testing may also be done. In this method, small needles inject the allergen into the top level of the skin.

It is important to know that use of antihistamine medications must be stopped before your visit for skin tests. These medications interfere with the testing and can prevent your doctor from properly diagnosing your allergies.

If skin testing isn't possible, blood allergy testing is conducted. Blood allergy testing is more expensive than skin tests and the results are typically not as accurate. However, this method can be done even when you are taking antihistamines or if you suffer from skin conditions.

The skin test and blood allergy test results must be interpreted by your allergist. Specialists from Dakota Allergy & Asthma are experienced in diagnosing and treating allergies and work with you to become familiar with your medical history.

## OTHER TESTING

Additional testing may be necessary to diagnose your nasal problems. CT scans of the sinuses provide a look into what is happening with the bones within the sinus region and identify possible infections. A rhinoscopy, which is a procedure that uses a small scope to look into the nose and throat, can also identify problems and help with diagnosis. Only on rare occasions are additional blood tests done. Medication trials are another alternative to help diagnose your nasal problems.



ALLERGY  
SKIN TESTING



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## IMMUNOTHERAPY

The goal of immunotherapy is to help you become less allergic.

This procedure is done by injecting allergens in the back of your arms or by placing the allergen under your tongue. Both methods require at least a three to five year course to get the long-term relief you need.

Allergy shots have long been the standard of care. Approximately 80% of patients benefit from this type of treatment. In the beginning, shots are given twice weekly. After the build-up phase, the injections are gradually reduced to once every four weeks.

Allergy shots are effective for combating multiple allergens, including tree, grass, or weed pollens, dust mites, dog or cat dander, and/or molds. However, allergy drops or tabs are normally used to treat only one inhaled allergen.

Though uncommon, some patients can have an allergic reaction to the allergy immunotherapy. While extremely rare, life-threatening reactions and deaths have occurred.

As a precautionary measure, you will be asked to wait in your physician's office for thirty minutes following an injection. That way, if a reaction occurs, it can be properly and immediately treated. Drop patients must have an Epi-pen ready when taking their dose in case of reactions.

Most patients discontinue immunotherapy after a five-year course. In most cases, these patients reap the benefits of being less allergic for years, and are able to reduce their necessary allergy medication by at least 50%.

## YOUR ALLERGY RELIEF

Working together with your allergist, you can expect to drastically reduce your allergy symptoms. Without the sneezing, itching, and runny congested nose, you can get the most out of life.

That is The Dakota Allergy Way.

