

For Your Benefit

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Seeking Allergy Relief

When Breathing Becomes Bothersome - by Stacey Colino

A change in season can brighten your days with vibrant new colors. But blooming flowers and falling leaves can usher in more than beautiful backdrops. Airborne substances that irritate your nose can blow in with the weather. When sneezing, itchy eyes, or a runny nose suddenly appears, allergies may be to blame.

Allergies arise when the body's **immune system** overreacts to substances, called allergens, that are normally harmless. When a person with **allergies** breathes in allergens—such as pollen, mold, pet dander, or dust mites—the resulting allergic reactions in the nose are called allergic rhinitis, or hay fever.

Allergy is one of the most common long-term health conditions. “Over the past several decades, the prevalence of allergies has been increasing,” says Dr. Paivi Salo, an allergy expert at NIH. “Currently, airborne allergies affect approximately 10-30% of adults and 40% of children.”

Avoiding your allergy triggers is the best way to control your symptoms. But triggers aren't always easy to identify. Notice when and where your symptoms occur. This can help you figure out the cause.


“Most people with allergies are sensitive to more than one allergen,” Salo explains. “Grass, weed, and tree pollens are the most common causes of outdoor allergies.” Pollen is often the source if your symptoms are seasonal. Indoor allergens usually trigger symptoms that last all year.

If your symptoms become persistent and bothersome, visit your family physician or an allergist. They can test for allergy sensitivities by using a skin or blood test. The test results, along with a medical exam and information about when and where your symptoms occur, will help your doctor determine the cause.

Even when you know your triggers, avoiding allergens can be difficult. When pollen counts are high, stay inside with the windows closed and use the air conditioning. Avoid bringing pollen indoors. “If you go outside, wash your hair and clothing,” Salo says. Pets can also bring in pollen, so clean them too.

For indoor allergens, keep humidity levels low in the home to keep dust mites and mold under control. Avoid upholstered furniture and carpets because they harbor allergens. Wash your bedding in hot water, and vacuum the floors once a week.

Allergies run in families. Your children's chances of developing allergies are higher if you have them. While there's no “magic bullet” to prevent allergies, experts recommend breast feeding early in life. “Breast milk is the least likely to trigger allergic reactions, it's easy to digest, and it strengthens an infant's immune system,” Salo says.



Sometimes, avoiding allergens isn't possible or isn't enough. Untreated allergies are associated with chronic conditions like sinus infections and **asthma**. Over-the-counter antihistamines, nasal sprays, and decongestants can often ease mild symptoms. Prescription medications and allergy shots are sometimes needed for more severe allergies. Talk with your doctor about treatment options. Allergy relief can help clear up more than just itchy, watery eyes. It can allow you to breathe easy again and brighten your outlook on seasonal changes.

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Where Retirees Underestimate Spending

Underestimating how much you'll spend can be costly, so it's key to know the common pitfalls - by Neal Templin

Navigating retirement can be difficult for lots of reasons. One of the biggest is that it forces people to make plans based on spending assumptions that won't become a reality for decades.

Guessing wrong can be the difference between a comfortable retirement and one that is a struggle.

"It's a lot more difficult to recover in retirement," says Adam Van Wie, a financial planner in Jacksonville Beach, Fla. "You can try to find another job, but that's not an option for everyone."

We spoke to financial advisers about some of the most frequent mistakes people make when it comes to estimating how much they'll spend in retirement.

Helping family. You may be willing to slash your own expenses in retirement if times get tough. What will you do if your children, or grandchildren, get in a bind? Saying no is much harder.

But saying yes can imperil your own retirement. A number of parents who guaranteed their children's school loans have seen their own finances ruined when the child defaulted on the loan.

Mark McCarron, a financial planner in Charlottesville, Va., is working with a retired couple who paid for the wedding of one daughter, and expect to pay shortly for the wedding of their other daughter as well.

They have the cash, says Mr. McCarron. The rub is that they just hadn't planned on paying for weddings when they retired, and it reduces the funds they can draw upon for other purposes.

Big-ticket periodic items. Would-be retirees often meticulously estimate day-to-day expenses, but forget to factor in more periodic, and mostly predictable, expenses like a new car or a new roof. And those big-ticket items inevitably blow holes in their budgets.

Dana Anspach, a financial planner in Scottsdale, Ariz., recommends that clients set aside 3% of the value of their house each year for maintenance—as well as plan on setting aside money for the periodic new car.

One caveat: Beware of taking big chunks of money out of a 401(k) or other tax-deferred accounts, Ms. Anspach says. Such withdrawals are treated as taxable income and can push retirees into a higher tax bracket. A better approach is to withdraw the money gradually over a two- or three-year period for an expected expense.

Belinda Ellison of Greenville, S.C., who recently retired as a lawyer, sets aside money for unforeseen landscaping expenses. So she was ready when she had to spend \$10,000 recently to remove a huge tree on her property. Ms. Ellison owns a 100-year-old home, and has another fund set up for renovation expenses.

It's not so with everybody she knows. "I have friends who have trouble when they need a new set of tires," Ms. Ellison says.

Entertainment. Many retirees are surprised at how much their entertainment costs rise when they stop working, says Neil A. Brown, a financial adviser in West Columbia, S.C. Instead of working five or six days a week and playing one, it can be the opposite. "You've got five or six days to play," Mr. Brown says.

Americans age 65 to 74 spent an average \$5,832 on entertainment in 2015, according to a study from the Employment Benefit Research Institute, based in Washington, D.C. Entertainment spending declines with age; people 85 and over in the study spent \$2,232 on average.

Health care. Even Medicare recipients are frequently shocked by the cost of health care, says Joan Cox, a financial planner in Covington, La. Ms. Cox says a married couple in their late 60s can expect to spend close to \$13,000 a year in medical expenses. That assumes \$8,000 in Medicare premiums and supplemental insurance premiums, \$1,200 for drug coverage, and \$3,700 in out-of-pocket expenses.

"I'll do their financial plan, and it looks like they have plenty of assets" for retirement, she says. "Then I'll put in health-care costs, and all of sudden their plan doesn't work."

Drugs costs, in particular, surprise retirees, says David Armes, a financial planner in Long Beach, Calif., who specializes in helping clients evaluate Medicare options. “Many of these cost drivers cannot be accurately predicted when you’re in your 60s,” he says. “There’s no way for 65-year-olds to know, for instance, whether they will need to take expensive brand-name drugs when they reach their 80s.”

For affluent retirees, there can be another surprise with Medicare. Couples whose modified adjusted gross income exceeds \$170,000 a year must pay higher premiums. To lessen those expenses, a couple might try shifting income to one year so that they will avoid higher Medicare premiums in other years, says Mr. Armes. Long-term care. The need for long-term care is perhaps the most costly unexpected expense in retirement.

About 15% of retirees will spend more than \$250,000 on such care, according to a research report to be released this spring by Vanguard Group. The problem is it is impossible to know who will be part of that 15%. Some 50% of retirees won’t spend anything at all, and 25% will spend less than \$100,000, the Vanguard report says.

“It’s hard to plan for,” says Colleen Jaconetti, a senior investment analyst with Vanguard.

For years, financial planners urged people to buy long-term care insurance. But that market has shrunk dramatically in recent years after insurers underestimated costs and were forced to jack up premiums or withdraw from new sales. Some insurers now offer hybrid policies that combine life insurance and long-term-care insurance. These policies allow consumers to tap their death benefits early to pay for costs such as help with feeding, bathing and other personal needs. Living a long life. One of the biggest mistakes people make in estimating retirement expenses is underestimating how long they will live.

The average 65-year-old in the U.S., for example, is likely to live an additional 19.4 years, according to data from the National Center for Health Statistics. Obviously, the longer the life, the more the spending. It can be a good problem to have—but one that surprises too many people.

“Everybody worries about dying young,” says Prof. David Littell of the American College of Financial Services. “People should be more worried about living too long.”

