



# Allergic Rhinitis, Environmental Triggers and Treatment Modalities

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**R**hinitis is defined by the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI) as a condition “characterized by 1 or more of the following nasal symptoms: congestion, rhinorrhea ... sneezing and itching” (Wallace et al., 2008, p. S3). The World Allergy Organization (Pawankar, Canonica, Holgate, & Lockey, 2012) estimates that rhinitis affects 10 percent to 30 percent of all adults, and the incidence is increasing. Rhinitis can have a profound effect on people’s health, productivity and quality of life.

### Comorbidities and Cost

Rhinitis is more than just “a runny nose,” as shown by the comorbidities in Box 1. It can have a significant impact on many body systems and functions. Rhinitis can be allergic or nonallergic. The difference is that the immune system is involved only in allergic rhinitis. Meltzer and Bukstein (2011) estimated that the direct cost associated with allergic rhinitis is approximately \$3.4 billion. In addition, allergic rhinitis is the fifth leading cause of chronic diseases in the United States (Blaiss, 2010).

**Abstract** Allergic rhinitis is a clinical condition with effects ranging from mildly bothersome to life-threatening. Women’s quality of life as well as productivity at home, at work and in the community can be greatly affected. It’s imperative that clinicians engage in a complete health history with each woman presenting with allergic rhinitis to try to identify potential environmental triggers. Once the allergens are identified, a multifaceted treatment plan can be devised to help women maintain optimal functionality. DOI: 10.1111/1751-486X.12081

**Keywords** allergic rhinitis | allergy | asthma | environmental trigger | seasonal allergies



## Box 1.

### Comorbid Conditions of Allergic Rhinitis

Acute otitis media  
Anaphylaxis  
Asthma  
Depression  
Eczema  
Eustachian tube dysfunction  
Fatigue  
Gastrointestinal symptoms (e.g., nausea, vomiting, diarrhea)  
Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)  
Laryngitis  
Nasal polyps  
Otitis media with effusion  
Sinusitis  
Sleep disorder  
Viral infection

### Symptoms

Symptoms of allergic rhinitis are listed in Box 2. These symptoms frequently lead to women seeking health care to identify and control these symptoms. A thorough health history and physical examination are needed to properly treat each person's individual situation. Box 3 identifies possible physical examination findings in women with allergic rhinitis.

### Triggers

To have the greatest chance of successful treatment, symptom triggers must be identified. Triggers for allergic rhinitis can be found everywhere—in the home, workplace and environment at large. Triggers can be episodic and vary by season and geographic location. A detailed health history can provide clues and possible identification of offending substances (Estes, 2014). The challenge for clinicians is to look at all aspects of a woman's life to identify the trigger(s). This article presents three scenarios to help identify triggers of allergic rhinitis and various treatment options.

### Scenario #1—Environmental Triggers

A 78-year-old woman presents with itchy eyes, ears and nose. She has had persistent clear nasal drainage for 8 days. Two days ago she started having postnasal drip that is causing a cough and is keeping her up at night. She tells you that her 60-year high school reunion is next week and in preparation for this event she went to her basement to retrieve some old photos to take to the reunion. The photo box has been in the basement for years and she had to move a lot of dusty boxes in order to find the correct one. In addition, with the recent rains she smelled a musty odor in the basement and saw black mold around the carpet's edges.

### Home

The home environment contains many possible triggers for allergic rhinitis. A careful history can tease out these triggers. The trigger can be a new

## Box 2.

### Symptoms of Allergic Rhinitis

Dyspnea	Otalgia
Facial pressure	Rhinorrhea
Fatigue	Sense of smell changes
Headache	Sleep apnea
Irritability	Sleep fragmentation
Itchy eyes, ears, nose, roof of mouth	Sneezing
Nasal congestion	Tearing eyes

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