

What's Better, Baseball or Allergies?

By Mark Schecker, M.D.

With the first scents of spring in the air and warmer weather approaching, many individual's thoughts turn to baseball. And, of course, baseball is better than allergies. Unfortunately, for some, the return of the "grand old game" coincides with the return of their not-so-grand old spring misery. At about the time the first pitch is thrown in spring training, pollen from oak, elm, sycamore, and walnut trees begin to appear in the air. In the latter innings of the spring, grass pollens are the offending culprits. These microscopic airborne particles are responsible for the sneezing fits, runny and stuffy noses, and itchy and watery eyes typical of seasonal allergy. The most unfortunate allergy sufferers get knocked down by a "fast ball" from asthma. With asthma, shortness of breath, wheezing, coughing, and chest tightness are the signs.

Suffering fortunately is not mandatory. A bullpen full of relief for allergy sufferers is available in many different forms. Of course, avoidance of the allergen is always most desirable. However, this is rarely easy or practical.

Some helpful tips include staying indoors on high pollen days and avoiding outdoor activities in the early morning hours when pollen counts are at their highest. Also, stay in air-conditioned environments because these units are excellent filters of airborne pollens. So keep your windows closed in your home and cars on clearer days.

When avoidance is suboptimal, alternative treatment in the form of medications designed to control symptoms and allergy shots can be used. Newer medications are much improved and those available by prescription are free of many of the debilitating side effects of their older over-the-counter counterparts.

Allergy shots or immunotherapy, as this treatment is also known, is like getting vaccinated against allergies. Over time, symptoms disappear, freeing the patient from misery and the need for frequent medication.

So don't be a bench warmer this year. See an allergist to help you get back in the game by controlling your allergies or asthma.