

It's Spring and My Eyes **ITCH**

By Bonnie Aiken, OD

North Carolina awakens from winter; leaves on trees begin to bud, flowers begin to bloom, and your sinuses become sensitive. Often the beauty of spring also means itchy red eyes, excess tears, and puffy eyelids.

There are many things you can do to make the season more comfortable for your eyes in addition to using drops. Begin washing your hands and face more frequently, especially after coming indoors. Try to keep your hands away from your face. The skin on your fingers is thick and insensitive compared to the thin and sensitive skin of the lids. Often your eyes' response is exacerbated because of everything that your fingers have touched before you put your hand near your face. Another tip is to wash your hair before going to bed and wash pillowcases more frequently. Hair is very porous and transfers allergens onto your pillow, and then as you sleep your eyes get increased exposure. Women with long hair could also consider pulling their hair back off their face, especially while sleeping.

Cool compresses applied for three to five minutes will decrease the itch and decrease the eyelid swelling. These compresses can be a gel mask chilled in the refrigerator or something as simple as a bag of frozen peas or crushed ice wrapped in a clean cloth. If none of these are available, then a paper towel run

under cool water is better than rubbing your eyes. It is important to resist rubbing your eyes because it breaks histamines, which starts a cascade of worsening symptoms.

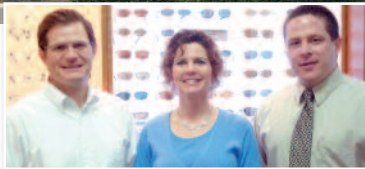
Before grabbing one of the many anti-allergy eye drops on the drugstore shelf, consider increasing lubrication with artificial tear drops such as Systane Ultra or Optive. By applying lubricating drops approximately every four hours, you will rinse the pollens and decrease contact time with your ocular surface and therefore reduce any reaction. Complicating all of this is the fact that many of the medicines taken to decrease your sinus allergy symptoms also dry your eyes.

Currently there are many "anti-allergy" eye drops available over the counter. Those claiming to "take the red out" are simply constricting the blood vessels and hiding the underlying problem. To better stabilize the allergic reaction, consider a former prescription strength eye drop that is now available over the counter such as Zaditor or Alaway. Apply these drops every 12 hours when symptoms begin and for the weeks during peak allergy season. Whenever you apply these or other medicated drops, always close your eyes for at least one minute after instillation; this puts more medicine on your ocular surface instead of down your nasal passages or spilled over onto your cheeks.

If these tips do not relieve your symptoms within a few days, then see your optometrist or ophthalmologist for evaluation as there are several very effective prescription eye drops available. There is no need to suffer from itchy red eyes while trying to enjoy the beauty of North Carolina in the spring.



We at Hawthorne Eye Associates are able to provide for all your eye care needs, be it...



Stephen Nagy, M.D., Bonnie Aiken, O.D., Chris Covington, D.O.

- Cataract surgery
- Medical and surgical management of glaucoma
- Monitoring for diabetic retinopathy
- Annual eye exam
- New glasses
- Contact lens

1364 Westgate Center Dr., Winston-Salem, NC 27103

336-768-4140