

Battling the Evil Fairy Dust

By Suze Hargraves

Ah spring. The flowers are blooming. The trees are budding. Nature's beauty abounds. Well at least I think it does because quite honestly, I can't really see it very well. It's early and I haven't taken my allergy medicine yet. My eyes are tearing so much I'm going to glue Kleenex to my tear ducts. My only comfort at this early point in the day is that I know I'm not alone. Millions of Americans suffer the consequences of spring's budding glory. The most common seasonal allergy culprit in spring is pollen. Kidshealth.org gives us a simple definition of pollen: "Pollen is a fine powder produced by certain plants when they reproduce." It's like evil fairy dust. It gets inside your house, your car and even you when you take a breath. It even sticks to pet fur. If you're allergic to any one of the many types of pollen in the air in the spring you end up with teary eyes, runny/stuffy nose, itchy eyes, rashes, coughs and any number of other ailments including asthma flares.

Avoiding exposure to any allergen is the first line of defense. Unfortunately it's impossible to avoid things like air which is where pollen dances around. You can, however, minimize your suffering by using some common sense. The Mayo Clinic makes these recommendations:

- Stay indoors on dry, windy days — the best time to go outside is after a good rain, which helps clear pollen from the air.
- Delegate lawn mowing, weed pulling and other gardening chores that stir up allergens.
- Remove clothes you've worn outside; you may also want to shower to rinse pollen from your skin and hair.
- Ban your pets from your bed or couch — pollen clings to pet fur.
- Don't hang laundry outside — pollen can stick to sheets and towels.
- If you do outside chores, wear a dust mask.

Although this is solid advice, I am a realist. I know that some of these things just aren't going to happen. Staying indoors on dry, windy days is good advice, but not likely advice that most of us have the option of taking. People have to do things like work, shop, go to school etc. What you can do is be sensible:

- Keep car windows closed if possible.
- Give Fido or Fluffy a nice rub down with a wet cloth at night.
- Use a good vacuum on a regular basis. Use good quality air cleaners in your home.
- Keep a jacket or sweater at the office to avoid having a pollen-coated cloak around you all day and don't sleep or lie on your bed in your street clothes.
- Don't use fans in your windows. Use a rotating floor fan (not foolproof but still a better alternative) or an air conditioner.
- If you have to do your own yard work, do it on days with little to no wind. If that's not possible, you'll have to bear the potential teasing and wear a mask. Tell people you're a "yard surgeon".
- Get some sunglasses that will wrap around and keep the pollen out of your eyes. Wear them whenever you're outside. Protect your eyes!
- Use a wet or damp rag or other absorbent option to dust your home and car on a regular basis, if not daily.
- Read your labels on any allergy medications your taking. If they're not working consult a healthcare provider or your pharmacist for advice. If your allergies are affecting your quality of life you should speak with a healthcare provider.

Seasonal allergies are a sort of predictable misery. With common sense and a bit of preparation we can put up a good fight against the evil fairy dust that is pollen and enjoy spring.

I'll see you in the Kleenex aisle!