

How to run symptom-free outdoors

By Christine Luff, About.com Guide

If you suffer with seasonal allergies, or hay fever, running outdoors can be a not-so-pleasant experience during allergy season. Even a short run outdoors can trigger symptoms such as sneezing, wheezing, runny nose, and itchy, watery eyes. But it is possible to run outdoors even if you suffer from seasonal allergies. Follow these tips to keep your runs symptom-free:

Plan workouts when pollen counts are low.

Pollen concentrations are usually highest from 5 a.m. to 10 a.m., according to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology. Check your local pollen counts at sites such as Pollen.com¹.

Know your personal pollen count.

While some people develop symptoms when pollen counts are 20 to 100 grains per cubic meter, others can tolerate much higher counts. Pay attention to the pollen counts and keep track of when you start to experience symptoms. Then you can choose to run outside when the pollen count is below your personal tolerance level.

Avoid itchy eyes.

If you suffer from itchy, watery eyes during allergy season, try wearing wraparound sunglasses when run outside. You can also try using eyedrops about an hour before you head outside.

Use your inhaler.

If you have asthma, use your inhaler about 15 minutes before you start running, and make sure you warm up slowly. Be careful not to overdo it and bring your inhaler with you on your run, just in case.

Avoid running on windy days.

The wind spreads pollen throughout the air, so run indoors when it's windy. You may even want to avoid running outdoors the day after high winds.

Shower right after your run.

The worst allergy symptoms usually don't occur until about an hour after you come in contact with the pollen, so you may actually be able to run outdoors without experiencing symptoms. But to reduce your risk of symptoms after your run, make sure you take a shower and put on clean clothes as soon as you get back from your run.

Don't run outside if you're tired.

When you're tired or rundown, your immune system is likely to react more quickly and severely to an allergen. So try to avoid exercising outdoors if you're tired or jet lagged.

Use your allergy medications.

For best results, take your allergy medications on a regular basis so you are fully protected when you do go outside. If you normally use medication (such as an oral antihistamine pill) only when you know you will be exposed to an allergen, take it a few hours before you head outdoors.

Cover your nose and mouth.

You might want to consider wearing a mask or bandana to cover your mouth and nose. It will decrease the amount of pollen that gets into your nose and lungs.

Run after a rainstorm.

Pollen counts drop as the rain washes the pollen away, so you're less likely to experience symptoms after it rains.