

## SPRING IS IN THE AIR AND IN THE EYES

**HALIFAX** – Spring is in the air and those with allergies can tell you, for them spring arrives with red, itchy, watery eyes.

Seasonal allergic conjunctivitis often begins in early spring for those with reactions to tree pollen, while those sensitive to grasses react in summer and ragweed sensitivities occur in late summer. Other individuals have chronic problems with allergies triggered by dust and animal dander.

"An itchy, red and watery eye is your body's way of overreacting to your environment," explains Nova Scotia Association of Optometrists' President, Dr. Jeff Sangster. Other symptoms can include swelling, burning or a sensation of fullness in the eyes or eyelids, an urge to rub the eyes, sensitivity to light and occasionally, blurred vision.

The most obvious and practical way to avoid the symptoms, he says, is simply to avoid the offending allergen whenever possible. He offers the following suggestions on behalf of the Nova Scotia Association of Optometrists:

- \* **Use air conditioning.** You can ease the effects of seasonal pollens by closing your windows and turning on an air conditioner, which not only cools and dries the air but also cleans it.
- \* **Apply cool compresses.** Applied to your eyes, these can be soothing, and help to constrict the irritated blood vessels.
- \* **Stay indoors.** If possible, stay indoors when pollen counts are generally highest - from about 5 a.m. to 10 a.m.
- \* **Don't rub your eyes.** Your hands can introduce allergens directly to your eyes, and scratching or rubbing the eyes will only make the symptoms worse.
- \* **Rinse your eyes.** A simple irrigation with normal saline solution or artificial tears (not tap water) can be helpful to dilute the allergen.

If these simple tips don't relieve your symptoms, be sure to see your optometrist to confirm the problem and discuss treatment options. "Itchy, burning eyes may well be allergic eyes," points out Dr. Sangster, "but these symptoms can also be the result of other, more serious conditions, such as dry eyes, a viral infection, or a chronic inflammation of the eyelid. Only an eye health examination can determine this properly."

The Nova Scotia Association of Optometrists represents over eighty Doctors of Optometry throughout the province.

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