Fall Pollen Season!

Although showy goldenrod gets the bad rep, it’s mostly the tiny green flowers of ragweed that produce the problem pollen. For such seasonal allergies, the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology recommends a three-tier approach.

First, take one of the non-sedating antihistamines such as Zyrtec, Claritin or Allerga. Or, their generics, which are just as good and cheaper.

Recently, I was helping choose drugs for the state’s tactical paramedic drug list, and I saw that someone had put Zyrtec on the list. But I had seen that *The Medical Letter* had recommended fexofenadine (generic Allegra) instead. So I reviewed the literature.

Zyrtec isn’t supposed to make you sleepy, but it does, significantly. Claritin also makes you sleepy, if not as bad as Zyrtec. But Allegra doesn’t, even if you overdose on it. I figured that a sleepy sniper sounds like a bad idea, so we switched the Zyrtec to fexofenadine (generic Allegra). (I also found that any of these dries out my eyes so my contact lenses don’t last as long as normal. YMMV.)

If that’s not enough, the AAAAI *(did they name it that to be at the top of the phonebook?)* says to add a steroid nasal spray. Used to be they were prescription-only, but in February 2014, Nasacort became available over-the-counter, and later Flonase also became available OTC. Flonase is a better-known brand name, so they charge $5/bottle more; I use Nasacort. Note that steroid nasal sprays take hours to work; you won’t notice anything right away, but they work very well over the longer term.

If *that*’s not enough, then it’s time to add a third layer of treatment. That’s a prescription-only nasal spray called azelastine. Even the generic is somewhat expensive, and prescription versions such as Astelin and Astepro are even more expensive. But it works pretty well, and works right away. It’s a first-generation antihistamine, so some people may get sleepy from it (I don’t seem to). But if you use it just at night, who cares?

Best wishes for clear nostrils.