

With no allergies to explain your symptoms, you most likely have a condition called vasomotor rhinitis—known also as non-allergic rhinitis, because it often has the same symptoms as allergies but with different causes.

Whereas allergenic rhinitis (hay fever) occurs as a result of the immune system overreacting to environmental allergens (pollens, dustmite, dander and mold spores), vasomotor rhinitis is believed to be caused by an imbalance in the control of the nose by the autonomic nervous system. The nerves in turn regulate the blood vessels in the nose to over respond to various stimuli (to contract or dilate and produce mucus flow and congestion). Unlike the allergic form, nonallergic rhinitis rarely causes itchy nose, eyes or throat.

WHAT CAN TRIGGER VASOMOTOR RHINITIS?

The nose is very sensitive, and nasal symptoms can easily be triggered by multiple irritants such as cigarette smoke, pollution, aerosol sprays, car exhaust, candle shops, potpourri, powdered soaps, fabric softeners, perfumes, and colognes. These are not true *allergens*, but rather *irritants* that act through the nervous system to cause the symptoms.

Cold air as well as changes in weather, barometric pressure, and temperature may cause congestion or runny nose. In addition, stress and emotion, alcohol, or spicy foods may trigger symptoms.

Different people may have different triggers. Thus, while a normal person's nose may run on a very cold day, a vasomotor rhinitis sufferer's nose may start running simply by walking into a slightly colder (or slightly warmer) room, or from eating food that is slightly warmer or cooler than room temperature. While a normal person may tolerate a certain degree of cigarette smoke, the vasomotor rhinitis sufferer may experience significant discomfort.

IS THERE A ROOT CAUSE FOR VASOMOTOR RHINITIS?

The cause of vasomotor rhinitis is not very well understood currently. In general, age of onset occurs after 20 years of age, in contrast to allergic rhinitis which generally appears before age 20. Individuals suffering from vasomotor rhinitis typically experience symptoms year-round, though symptoms may exacerbate in the spring and fall when rapid weather changes are more common.

CAN YOU TREAT VASOMOTOR RHINITIS?

It is important to have an accurate diagnosis so you can manage your condition appropriately. Because the symptoms are so similar, allergy testing is often recommended to rule out allergic rhinitis.

Nasal symptoms in vasomotor rhinitis may not respond as well as allergic rhinitis to medical treatment, and it may take several changes in medication to find what works best for you. Avoiding triggers will help reduce but will not eliminate symptoms.