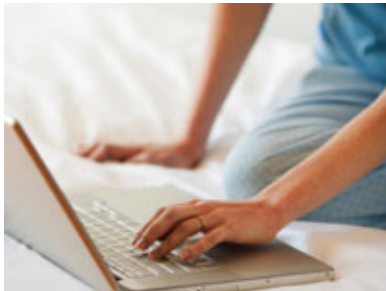


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## **Pollen Trackers and Widgets: 5 Online Tools That Help Fight Allergies**



Got allergies? If you do, the Internet offers a host of helpful options, from widgets to iPhone applications to pollen-counting programs that deliver daily emails to your inbox. Used correctly, these digital tools can help fight allergies in the real world, experts say.

Before you rush to sign up or download, however, you might need a bit of help from your doctor. He or she can determine the true culprits behind your sneezing, stuffy nose, and watery eyes, says Stanley Fineman, MD, an allergist with the Atlanta Allergy and Asthma Clinic, in Georgia.

“You may need some skin tests to correlate the onset of your symptoms with specific pollen or outdoor allergens. Once you are diagnosed and can correlate that pollen, for example, triggers your symptoms, you can be on the alert,” he says.

In general, tree pollen levels are highest in late winter and spring; grass and weed pollen tends to peak in late summer and fall. Mold, on the other hand, doesn’t really have a specific season. Any time weather is damp and warm—from spring thaw to the last gasp of summer—mold spores can be circulating in the trillions. Mold spores can be highest in rainy winter months in warm climates, such as California.

If you’re not sure what is triggering your symptoms, use [these Web-based self-tests](#) from the American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology to find out if you might have [allergies](#) or [asthma](#) and to [locate the right allergist](#).

Once you know what's triggering your allergies, and when the allergen is in season, you can start taking medication at the right time of year to stop symptoms before they start.

Although the Internet-based pollen watchers and widgets are relatively new, the process of collecting and counting pollen has been going on for decades, and the results typically are published in local newspapers. Experts have long known that high pollen counts cause sniffing, sneezing, and other nasal allergy symptoms.

"We collect the pollen the same way as we did before," says Dr. Fineman, who also supervises a local pollen-counting station. "We used to send it by fax or call-in lines to local TV stations, radio, and newspapers, so it was more regional. Now, with the Internet, you can get an email that says what the pollen count is in your area every day."

And that's a good thing. "People who are diagnosed with asthma that is made worse by pollen and people who have been diagnosed with seasonal allergic rhinitis need to keep track of pollen and other outdoor allergen levels," says William Lunn, MD, the director of the interventional pulmonary service at Baylor College of Medicine, in Houston.

To get started, here's a guide to the worthwhile Web tools that can help you fight sniffing, sneezing, and watery eyes.

- **The Weather Channel**

[Sign up for pollen alerts](#) that can be sent to you via email or text message. You just plug in your information and select the time of day you want the alerts, and how often.

- **The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology**

The AAAAI's National Allergy Bureau offers an [interactive map](#) that allows users to click on a location for current pollen and mold levels in that area. This same service also allows people with allergies to [sign up for email alerts](#) with trees, weeds, grass, and mold counts from their local monitoring center.

- **Pollen.com**

This website offers a wealth of interactive, personalized information on pollen counts. It boasts a free [Allergy Alert application](#) for iPhone and iPod Touch users that supplies one- or four-day forecasts in four categories: allergies (i.e., pollen), cold and cough, asthma, and ultraviolet rays. A sister site, [PollenWidgets.com](#), also offers widgets for daily or four-day pollen counts available through Yahoo Widgets or Google Gadgets.

- **Pollen Report iPhone App**

[This app](#) updates users on pollen levels in a specific area code. (Added bonus? You get the local high and low temperatures, too.)

- **[Airnow.gov](#)**

This site, run by federal government agencies, doesn't have a pollen watcher, but you can use it to [check local levels of ozone](#), a pollutant that can make it harder for people with asthma to breathe. The site also provides a daily Air Quality Index as well as [email notifications](#). (You can even access [webcams](#) to get a real-time look at local haze conditions.)

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