

The Pollen

Issue N°10 - The Truth about Pollen Counts

To most people, today's pollen score will tell them how miserable they should feel on a given day. However, these scores should be taken lightly and not be relied upon as absolute.

Before we explain why that is, here is some background on how pollen collection is carried out. Pollen collectors tend to be Allergists, as they are trained on how to identify the different types of pollen grains and mold spores. To perform a pollen count, a collector will set up a collection device that will sample the air, trapping any pollen grains that are located there. The collector will stain, analyze and identify the pollen grains under a microscope. Pollen counts are shared with both National Allergy Bureau and Pollen.com, but since posted scores are not collected by either agency and they rely on receiving the information from independent analysts, their data may not always be current to the day that you view it.



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Also, since the data are collected at specific locations, such as the roof of the allergist's office, pollen counts may not be consistent with the actual pollen count at your exact location. Depending how far away you are from the nearest pollen collector, you could be coming into contact with significantly different pollens. Pollen counts are also largely dependent upon environmental factors; rain, time of day, temperature, wind, and pollution which will ultimately affect pollen scores.

Two studies published in 2005 show that pollen counts do not have a direct correlation to when people are symptomatic. The studies describe what is known as the "priming affect". This means that they found that study participants did not start experiencing symptoms until an average of 15 days after pollen counts began. However, once the patients started to experience the symptoms, they remained symptomatic even during low pollen counts.

Essentially, this data suggests that individual pollen counts are not indicative of your current symptoms, yet the presence of pollen over a period of time will steadily increase symptoms. These studies also show that symptoms worsen where air pollution is worse, indicating that there is more to the story than merely pollen counts.^{1,2}

In conclusion, don't let your local pollen scores influence your expectation of how you should feel today. Instead, use the scores as a guide and put them in context along with your allergy test results to help you understand which allergens may be causing your symptoms during this season.

Most importantly, Immunotherapy should not be stopped at any time during the course of treatment. Rather, if you experience increased allergy symptoms during peak seasons it's OK to take allergy medication to temporarily alleviate them.

1. Colás C, Monzón S, Venturini M, et al. Correlation between Chenopodiaceae/Amaranthaceae pollen counts and allergic symptoms in *Salsola kali* monosensitized patients. *J Invest Allergol Clin Immunol*. 2005; 15(4): 254-258.

2. Sánchez JA, Brandao R, Lopes L, et al. Correlation between pollen counts and symptoms in two different areas of the Iberian Peninsula: Cordoba (Spain) and Evora (Portugal). *J Invest Allergol Clin Immunol*. 2005; 15(2): 112-116.

3. Cox L, Nelson H, Lockey R. Allergen Immunotherapy: A practice parameter third update. *J Allergy Clin Immunol*. 2011. S1-S55.