



The SAS (Surviving Allergy Season) Handbook - A Hitchhiker's Guide To Allergies

Spring has sprung, the grass has riz...I wonder where my Kleenex is? While April showers bring May flowers, for an approximate 10 to 20 % of the North American population they also bring runny noses, itchy eyes, sneezing, sinus headaches, fatigue and all of those other joys that accompany seasonal allergies. Typically allergies to trees and some molds begin in the spring, while allergies to grasses occur in the summer and ragweed allergies persist from August until the first frost. While you can't live in a bubble for your entire allergy season, there is hope. Not only can you alleviate the symptoms you are experiencing, you can prevent them from occurring in the first place.

Seasonal allergies happen when antibodies in your immune system (known as IgE) attack pollens or other molecules from the environment, which they believe to be potential invaders or disease. When they do this they release signaling messengers called cytokines which promote inflammation and trigger the body's natural defenses. We experience these defenses as a release of histamines, which results in swelling of our mucus membranes and the general nasty cascade of discomfort listed above. Current medical treatments attempt to control the symptoms using antihistamines, decongestants and nasal corticosteroids. While these can help alleviate the symptoms temporarily, they do not affect the immune background that has caused the initial reaction and therefore are not a cure. Furthermore there maybe many unwanted side effects to these medications including drowsiness and sedation. Since naturopathic medicine aims to heal the body and eliminate the symptoms permanently, naturopathic doctors focus their treatments on decreasing the production of the inflammatory messengers.

Gut Feelings – Your Digestion Could Be Causing Your Allergies!

Numerous studies have shown that poor digestion can cause seasonal allergies as well as other types of allergic reactions. When people with allergies are exposed to their triggers, a part of the immune system located in your intestinal tract (known as the gut-associated immune system or GALT) becomes activated. This results not only in the production of bad cytokines and inflammation, it can also cause a decrease in the good bacteria which live in and protect our intestinal tract. When these types of bacteria are lost, large undigested particles of food and inflammatory messengers can cross into the blood stream and travel to parts of the body outside of the intestines. For this

reason elimination diets and both pre and pro-biotics are helpful in the treatment and permanent eradication of allergy symptoms^{1,2,3}. Stress and decreased adrenal function can also contribute to the problem, as they can lower the production of the protective antibodies found in the mucous membranes (called secretory IgA) including those that line the intestinal tract.

Unclear and Present Danger – The Hidden Symptoms of Allergies

Think that because you don't experience the typical symptoms of allergies this doesn't apply to you? Think again. The body has many ways of alerting us to the presence of invading forces. In adults weight gain and obesity, skin conditions, bowel problems, headaches, muscle and joint aches and pains and asthma are all potential ways your body could be trying to let you know you are under attack. While children can also experience these same symptoms ADHD, hyperactivity, chronic and recurring ear, throat or urinary tract infections, bed wetting and stomach aches are also possible signs of an underlying allergy.

Foods That Hurt, Foods That Heal.

Research indicates that foods play a prominent role in the development of allergies. Exposure to specific food allergens as early as during pregnancy can increase the risk of a child developing allergies⁴. Overexposure to these triggers by eating the offending foods too frequently can also have the same effect. In particular margarine, citrus fruits, deep fried fats, saturated fats, milk, caffeine, alcohol, spices, fruit juices, diet beverages and products, peanuts, wheat products, corn, red meat, baked goods (crackers, pies, bagels etc) and artificial colors and flavors are all possible offenders⁵. The good news is that eating fish and other sources of omega 3 essential fatty acids can help prevent and treat allergic conditions, as they decrease the production of bad inflammatory cytokines^{4,6,7}.

Natural Antihistamines and Other Naturopathic Solutions

If you want a quick fix to help relieve the symptoms associated with allergies, there are many natural antihistamines available which have none of the unwanted side effects of pharmaceutical medications. Both quercetin and good old vitamin C are two of the most popular. Hesperidin is also very effective in controlling the itchy eyes, runny nose and swollen mucous membranes associated with allergies. Currently research has been focusing on spirulina and polyphenols (specifically those found in apples) which have been proven to effectively decrease the incidence of sneezing attacks and nasal discharge^{8,9}.

While natural antihistamines can be used long term therapeutically to help prevent and treat allergies, there are other important supplements which can target the chemical messengers or cytokines and therefore directly affect the inflammatory process which is happening in the body. These are critical if you wish to permanently eliminate your allergies. Evening Primrose oil, zinc and an herb called *Boswellia serata* have all been proven to effectively decrease inflammation by turning off bad pro-inflammatory cytokines and turning on the

good ones^{10,11,12}. Promoting proper liver function has also been proven to be essential in the prevention and treatment of allergies¹³. Environmental pollutants and other toxins (such as pesticides, fungicides, herbicides and industrial chemicals) have been shown to mimic the action of steroid hormones in the body, which can result in allergies as well as cancers, infertility and reproductive disorders. Therefore regular liver cleanses, herbs and vitamins and minerals which support the flow of bile can all be effective tools in freeing you from your allergy symptoms.

The goal of naturopathic medicine is always to treat each person as a unique individual, so it is very important that you consult with your health care provider before starting any new dietary or supplement regime. Determining your individual needs will ensure you get the results you want in a safe, healthy and effective manner.

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