



Natural Remedies To Manage Environmental Allergies

Do you love the spring but hate how it makes you feel? Are you plagued with sneezing, itchy eyes, dizziness, asthma/difficulty breathing, sinus problems/headaches, or a runny/stuffy nose? Have over-the-counter (OTC) or prescription allergy medications and nasal sprays made you feel worse? If so, consider trying some of the natural remedies discussed below.

Definitions & Symptoms

Allergy symptoms are abnormal immune system reactions to specific agents known as antigens, which include airborne substances, chemicals and particular foods. Grass, tree, and weed pollens often cause seasonal allergies. Some people find that dust mites, pet dander, feathers, or mold/fungus cause year-round discomfort. The most common food allergens include gluten (found in wheat, rye, barley and oats), lactose/casein (found in dairy products), soy, fish, corn, peanuts/tree nuts, and additives. Although not all sensitivities and intolerances are true allergies, these terms are commonly used to mean the same thing. Exposure to offending irritants provokes the release of various pro-inflammatory substances such as histamines, enzymes and leukotrienes. While most are familiar with the allergic responses noted above, there are others that can be equally uncomfortable. These include fatigue, inability to focus, muscle spasms/extreme tightness, eczema, throat soreness, and sleep difficulties. Various health conditions, including candidiasis/leaky gut syndrome, digestive problems, and a weakened immune system, can aggravate or cause allergic responses.

The Conventional Approach: Antihistamines & Nasal Sprays

To manage allergy symptoms, traditional medicine offers a variety of prescription and over-the-counter medications, all of which have potential side effects, including: (1) antihistamines (e.g., Allegra®, Claritin®, Zyrtec®)- dry eyes/nose, headaches, altered vision, stomach upset; (2) decongestants (e.g., Sudafed®, Dimetapp®, Actifed®)- insomnia, nausea, nervousness; (3) nasal corticosteroids (e.g., Flonase®, Nasonex®, Nasacort®)- nose bleeds/irritation/burning, predisposition to sinusitis, suppressed immunity, headaches, throat irritation; and (4) nasal decongestants/phenylephrine (e.g., Neo-Synephrine®, Afrin®)- nervousness/irritability, hypertension, heart palpitations, insomnia, nausea, headaches, weakness.

Natural Approaches to Environmental Allergies

While avoiding the problem substance is the best way to reduce or eliminate an allergic reaction, this is not always possible. When environmental allergens irritate your eyes, nose, sinuses, lungs or throat, try these naturally healthy therapies:

Nasal Washing: The First Line of Defense

Rinsing the nose with a hypertonic (saltier than the body's natural state) saline, aloe and xylitol rinse safely clears it of airborne contaminants, including pollens, pollutants, viruses, and irritants. This remedy has no side effects and is non-habit forming and safe for children. The saline/aloe solution shrinks and heals swollen membranes, improves

mucus flow, relieves nasal dryness, enhances relaxed, deeper breathing, can reduce the frequency of upper respiratory infections (including colds) when used regularly, and can improve bad breath and sense of smell.

Xylitol is a natural sugar derived most often from corn cobs/stalks, birch trees and strawberries. Its unique molecular structure makes it a valuable antibacterial. When the saline-xylitol solution (available as Xlear) is sprayed into the nose, bacteria lose their ability to adhere to the nasal and sinus cavities. Xylitol can also prevent earaches by preventing bacterial growth in the Eustachian tubes. Don't be surprised if you experience immediate relief!

Essential Fatty Acids (EFAs): Omega-3 & Omega-6

The correct doses of EPA and DHA, the omega-3 essential fatty acids (i.e., those that the body cannot manufacture) found in the oil of fatty fish (e.g., sardines, salmon, herring, tuna, and mackerel), resolve the inflammation underlying allergy symptoms and asthma. (Vegetarian flax oil contains only ALA, which must convert to EPA.) Some authorities maintain that GLA, found in evening primrose, black currant seed, and borage oils, is an omega-6 fatty acid that is also a potent anti-inflammatory. Since a deficiency or imbalance in these EFAs has a profound adverse effect on health, the recommended therapeutic dose is 1000mg of EPA and 500mg of GLA (including that from food).

Quercetin - Vitamin C – Bromelain

Quercetin, Vitamin C, and bromelain are commonly used together to combat multiple allergy symptoms. Quercetin and Vitamin C are natural antihistamines, and bromelain makes quercetin more bioavailable. All three nutrients can reduce inflammation, including that related to asthma. Quercetin is a safe, well-tolerated, inexpensive bioflavonoid found in high levels in onions, red wine, and green tea. It is also found in apples. Ester-C® is a highly bioavailable Vitamin C that will not irritate the stomach and works best when combined with bioflavonoids. Some double-blind research supports the use of bromelain, derived from the pineapple, to treat sinusitis and asthma (by reducing the thickness of mucus).

Stinging Nettle

For several decades, naturopathic physicians in the United States have used stinging nettle leaves to stimulate the immune system, reduce inflammation, and treat allergies (including hay fever). As an antispasmodic and expectorant, it can also treat coughs. In clinical practice, this writer has thus recommended 300mg, 3 times per day, to stop a runny nose and prevent itchy eyes and sneezing.

Conclusion

Why suffer? Though nature may be torturing you, it also has an answer. You can try these and other clinically proven allergy remedies with minimal-to-no health risk or side effects and at relatively little expense.

Submitted by Michael Dworkin, P.D., M.S., a Registered Pharmacist and State Certified Clinical Nutritionist (CT Certification #00203), with J. Erika Dworkin, J.D., Dip.C.N./Board Cert. Holistic Nutrition (pending). Owner of the Manchester Parkade Health Shoppe (860.646.8178, 378 West Middle Turnpike, Manchester), Pharmacist Dworkin has been guiding patients since 1956 and is available for consultation by appointment. Erika is available to speak to groups. References are available upon request. The statements in this article have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. None of the natural remedies discussed herein are intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. See ad on page 17.