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AYURVEDA

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Although allergies are less serious than annoying, they don't have to make our summer miserable

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Flowers are blooming, birds are chirping and trees are turning green with new life. It's spring. Unfortunately for some, this means a good healthy dose of allergic rhinitis, commonly known as hay fever. Those of us who suffer from this seasonal affliction may feel an urge to rub our noses, eyes and ears. We might even get a sore throat. All of this is simply our immune system's response to airborne pollens coming from different plants and flowers.

Hay fever usually manifests with relatively harmless symptoms like mild nasal congestion and skin irritation. Rarely, it can develop into a life-threatening illness of extreme allergic sensitivity called anaphylaxis. An allergy should not be confused with the common cold. For one thing, colds are highly infectious. Seasonal and perennial allergies are not. A person with a cold has a low-grade fever and cloudy nasal secretions. Allergy sufferers experience clear nasal discharge and usually no fever.

Both seasonal and perennial allergies have similar symptoms. The fundamental difference, of course, is that perennial allergies are a perpetual threat year-round. Up to 30 million people in the US suffer from seasonal allergies like hay fever. Although hay fever can occur at any age, it most often affects children and adolescents. It usually develops after at least two seasons of exposure to a new environment, which explains why people will not suffer from seasonal allergies immediately after moving to a new location.

The most common causes of seasonal allergies are the pollens of grass, trees, weeds and molds. In perennial allergies, house dust, animal dander, molds, mites, bacteria and a variety of chemicals are to blame. These latter elements are introduced into the home environment by domestic pets, carpets, forced air and gas heat.

Almost all victims of hay fever also have low-grade sinus infections. Also, many have too little stomach acid and too much intestinal yeast. These particular conditions are further aggravated by the intake of food additives and preservatives.

Hay fever victims often have red, irritated skin around the nose and dark circles under their eyes. Nasal congestion, nasal discharge, sneezing and palatal itching are also classic symptoms of this affliction. Sneezing that produces a thin but profuse nasal discharge may occur in annoying sessions of 10 to 20 sneezes at a time. There may also be headaches and earaches. Prolonged congestion may lead to some alteration or loss of smell and taste. Persistent post nasal drip might cause a dry cough and irritation in the throat.

Bronchial irritation prompted by allergies may cause reactive airway diseases that are often also experienced by asthma patients. Studies indicate that 38 percent of hay fever sufferers are also asthmatic, while only three to five percent of the general population suffer from asthma.

Mucous foods are a problem for allergy sufferers. Certain foods produce more mucous than others. These are recognized by Ayurvedic medicine as kapha foods and include wheat, sugar, potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, bananas, oranges, tangerines, grapefruits. For those seeking to reduce mucous, dry grains like chick peas, kala channa (gram), corn, buckwheat, amaranth and quinoa are good to eat. Diets rich in a variety of multi-colored fruits and vegetables are also highly recommended for good health generally and allergy patients specifically. I recommend that at least five fruits and two vegetables be taken on a daily basis.

Carpets are a major source of suffering for allergy patients because they breed dust mites. Dust mites are not a problem when they are alive. When they die, however, their body fragments become air born and cause allergic reactions in the mucous membranes of the nose, throat, eyes, ears and lungs.

My advice to allergy patients is to install stone, hardwood or laminated floors. If you are building a new house, don't install a gas heat furnace. Put in floor or electric heating instead. If you have gas heat and don't want to change, then use HEPA filters, which will improve the air quality indoors. Putting an extra charcoal filter in places where you spend more time would also be advisable.

We can also perform some internal body cleansing to help guard against allergies. Neti is especially recommended. Neti is the Ayurvedic douching of the nasal passages with water containing equal parts salt and baking soda. This practice alleviates allergy symptoms while soothing irritated mucous membranes. For allergy victims, performing neti is as important to practice daily as brushing the teeth.

A strengthened immune system provides excellent protection against allergies. Taking zinc (15 mgs) twice a day, water soluble vitamin A (10,000 IU) three times a day and of vitamin C (500 mgs) three times a day boosts the immune system. Quercetin, a bioflavoid taken twice a day, along with Ayurvedic herbs like guggul, shilajeet, amla and pippli also help. I recommend Guggal-lip, available from my company, Ayush Herbs Inc., when there are underlying food allergies and sinus infections. Guggal-lip acts like a steroid without negative side effects. It also yields a powerful anti-inflammatory agent. One tablet of Guggul-lip taken three times a day for three to four months should be adequate.

Shilajeet is a mineral pitch that also helps boost the immune system. One capsule (500 mg) of Shilajeet extract should be taken three times a day for three to four months. Pippli is a powerful anti-allergic herb that helps to improve digestion by stimulating gastric secretions. Almost all my patients with allergies have low hydrochloric acid in their stomachs. Pippli also produces more mucous to protect the stomach lining. Adding Amla Plex (one teaspoon, three times a day) can provide additional assistance in the prevention of allergies.

A fifty-year-old patient came to my clinic with a history of perennial allergies and chronic sinusitis. He had tried many different antibiotics and had been administering the nasal steroids for three years. By the time he came to me, he was experiencing frequent nose bleeds and his allergy symptoms had gotten worse. Once he started the protocols I have suggested above, his symptoms completely reversed. I, too, suffer from perennial allergies, and benefit greatly from these same protocols. If we can do it, so can you.

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