[IMAGE]

Sneeze No More

Get Rid of Allergy Symptoms Without Drugs

By Clair Whiteman

If you are one of the 26 million Americans who suffer from upper respiratory allergies, you may already be stocking up on tissues as we enter spring. Allergic rhinitis or hay fever is associated with a wide range of uncomfortable symptoms including excess mucous production, nasal blockage, sore throat, stuffy head, puffy eyes, and fatigue. Although none of these symptoms can be classified as life-threatening, anyone with allergies will tell you they can be a nuisance and interfere with daily activities. There are numerous medications that can be effective at masking allergy symptoms, but each comes with its inherent risks and may only treat the symptoms. Fortunately, there are also natural therapies available that can help your body manage the many underlying causes of allergies.

Breaking Down Allergies: The When, Why and How

There are three main forms of upper respiratory allergies. The most common form, *seasonal allergic rhinitis*, occurs only at specific times of the year in response to high circulating levels of pollen or other allergens in the air. Alternatively, *perennial allergic rhinitis* occurs year round and is often due to an allergy to pet dander or dust mite droppings. Finally *asthma* can also be classified as an allergic disorder when it is stimulated by exposure to an external irritant. This form of asthma is classified as *extrinsic or atopic* and is characterized by excessive mucous production, shortness of breath and cough.

Sneeze No More - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Allergies differ from other forms of illness as they are the result of overactivity of the immune system. When we think of being sick, we typically think of the immune system being unable to fight off an offending agent, such as a bacteria or virus. Allergies, on the other hand, occur when the body *initiates* an immune response to a non-offending substance, such as pollen or a type of food. In the case of upper respiratory allergies, the body initiates an immune response to an inhaled particle. When the particle comes in contact with the nasal surface, it links with specific antibodies known as IgE, which can be found on the surface of immune cells within the nasal mucosa.

Once this binding takes place, the body stimulates secretion of numerous inflammatory mediators including histamine, heparin, and kinins. These complexes take immediate action by causing nasal vascular dilation, which results in excess mucous production. Meanwhile, immune cells continue to produce other inflammatory messengers known as leukotrienes, which stimulate constriction of bronchial cells to further enhance allergic effects.

Potential Causes to Consider

Allergies and asthma are both increasing in prevalence within the developed world, leading researchers to look into environmental (non-genetic) factors as a possible causative factor. For example, children who are fed solid foods too early or receive antibiotic therapy within the first two years of life are more likely to develop both respiratory and food allergies. This indicates that there may be a protective mechanism in the immunoglobulins in mother's milk as well as the natural microflora of the nasal and oral passages.

Recently, researchers have begun to look at the overuse of antiseptics and antibiotics as another influential factor in the development of allergic rhinitis. This concept, known as the "hygiene hypothesis," proposes that lack of childhood exposure to microorganisms, both symbiotic (i.e., health-promoting probiotics) and pathogens, leads to modulation of the immune system to favor the development of unnecessary antibodies. Epidemiological support for this theory points to the lower incidence of allergies and autoimmunity in the developing world when compared to the increased incidence within industrialized societies.

Low intake of dietary antioxidants and exposure to cigarette smoke and other environmental pollutants are also strong indicators of increased allergy risk. Other potential factors which may increase allergy risk include low gastric acid secretion (known as hypochlorhydria) and intestinal overgrowth of yeast (*Candida albicans)*.

Why Drugs Aren't the Answer

Pharmaceutical management of allergies focuses on stopping the allergenic response, primarily via the inhibition of *histamine*. Antihistamines are a mainstay in the management of allergies, and although they have been improved upon in recent years, many antihistamine medications may cause significant brain fog and fatigue, among other potential side effects. Other commonly used medications for reducing allergens include steroids, which can be given via a spray directly to the nasal membranes or as an oral medication. These medications take action by modulating the underlying inflammatory pathways which contribute to

allergies and asthma. Unfortunately, use of steroidal anti-inflammatory medications can impair overall immune function, and therefore increase the risk of other infections. Other commonly used medications include expectorants, decongestants, and immunotherapy drugs, all of which provide varying levels of relief.

How to Fight Allergy Symptoms Naturally

When looking to control allergy symptoms naturally, the first step is to limit your exposure. Using an air filter, preferably one that ties into a central heating and air conditioning system, can drastically reduce the build-up of allergens in your home. It is also important to focus on areas where allergens can collect. Pet areas, carpets, rugs, and upholstered furniture should be cleansed regularly, and bedding should be washed at least once a week.

In addition to these simple steps, you may want to look to your diet as a means for controlling your allergy symptoms. A study of 35 patients conducted in the *Journal of Asthma* found a positive correlation between allergy relief and vegetarian or vegan diets. In a clinical observation, 92 percent of patients who followed a vegan diet for one year reported reduction in asthma symptoms. Improvement was seen in a number of clinical variables, including lung vital capacity and forced expiratory volume.

Relief from allergic rhinitis may also be achieved via elimination of allergenic foods in the diet. Foods that have been closely linked to respiratory allergies include dairy products, chocolate, sugar, and gluten. There is also strong evidence indicating a connection between allergic rhinitis and intake of certain food additives, including artificial dyes and colorants, sulfites, and benzoates. According to the *Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine*, evidence linking these compounds to asthma attacks may be so strong that avoidance of these synthetic additives could be vital to controlling allergy symptoms.

Intake of omega-3 fatty acids has also been shown to support healthy airways and additionally favor the production of anti-inflammatory mediators. In a 2009 study reported in the *International Archives of Allergy and Immunology*, atopic asthma patients supplemented daily with omega-3 fatty acids improved airway responsiveness even when subjects were exposed to a known allergen. Dietary sources of omega-3 fatty acids include cold water fish, flax seeds, chia seeds, and walnuts. Other powerful anti-inflammatory agents which may be beneficial include members of the allicin family, such as onions and garlic, ginger, rosemary, curcumin (turmeric), and the herb *Boswellia*.

Increasing intake of antioxidants is also essential to prevent the free radicals which are often elevated in allergies and asthma. Vitamin C is considered as one of the most important dietary antioxidants for the protection of the lungs, and low levels of blood vitamin C are considered an independent risk factor for allergic rhinitis. Other beneficial antioxidants may include vitamin E, selenium, the carotenoids, and the flavonoids, which all posses powerful free radical quenching capabilities. Of the flavonoid complexes, quercetin appears to be of extreme benefit as it has been shown to limit the production of both histamine and the leukotrienes.

Another nutritional substance that may be of benefit is bromelain, a proteolytic enzyme derived from the juices and stems of pineapples. Bromelain supports anti- inflammatory activity and supports the thinning of mucous to function as a natural decongestant.

Why go through life suffering from allergies if you don't have to? With a few dietary and lifestyle changes, you can face allergy season without stockpiling allergy medications and Kleenex. The big point is that these natural solutions not only fight allergy symptoms, but also help combat the underlying mechanisms which cause allergies while also supporting a healthy immune system. Talk to your doctor for more information about allergies and natural solutions.

Interesting Allergy Risk Factors

- Children who are fed solid foods too early or receive antibiotic therapy within the first two years of life are more likely to develop both respiratory and food allergies.
- Exposure to cigarette smoke and other environmental pollutants is another strong indicator of increased allergy risk.
- Low intake of antioxidants (found in various foods, particularly certain fruits and vegetables) may also increase allergy risk.
- Low gastric acid secretion (hypochlorhydria) and intestinal overgrowth of yeast (*Candida albicans)* may contribute to allergy onset as well.

Natural Solutions for Allergies and Their Symptoms

Limit Allergen Exposure: Using an air filter, preferably one that ties into a central heating and air conditioning system, can drastically reduce the build-up of allergens in your home. Pet areas, carpets, rugs,

and upholstered furniture should be cleansed regularly, and bedding should be washed at least once a week.

Avoid These Foods: Foods that have been closely linked to respiratory allergies include dairy products, chocolate, sugar, and gluten. There is also strong evidence suggesting that certain food additives, including artificial dyes and colorants, sulfites, and benzoates, are culprits.

Eat These Foods: Intake of omega-3 fatty acids has also been shown to support healthy airways and encourage the production of anti-inflammatory mediators. Also consider onions and garlic, ginger, rosemary, curcumin (turmeric), and the herb *Boswellia*.

Get Your Antioxidants: Increasing intake of antioxidants is also essential to prevent the free radicals which are often elevated in allergies and asthma. This includes vitamins C and E, selenium, carotenoids, and flavonoids. Bromelain, an enzyme, can also help.

Clair Whiteman, BSc, received her degree in nutrition and dietetics from Bastyr University in Washington state. She is currently the on-staff nutritionist for BioGenesis Nutraceuticals, a professional-grade supplement line.

Page printed from:
http://www.toyourhealth.com/mpacms/tyh/article.php?id=1286&no_paginate=true&no_b=true