

THE BETTER HEALTH NEWS

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Allergies are the sixth leading cause of chronic disease in the United States, costing the health care system \$18 billion each year (compared to \$6 billion spent in 2000). Between 9% and 15% of all Americans have hay fever. This promises to be a bad year for them, because of the mild winter and the early onset of warm weather, pollen levels are expected to be at an all-time high and it is expected that people with hay fever will really suffer from their symptoms this year.

In general, allergies are on the rise. More than 50 million Americans suffer with allergies and nearly 55% of Americans test positive for one or more allergens. Research appearing in the August, 2005 issue of the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* found that of 10,500 subjects tested, more than 50% were sensitive to at least one of ten common allergens. This is double the percentage of individuals tested for allergies 30 years ago.



Medical treatment of allergies is directed at symptoms, but they may undermine the general health and make the underlying cause of the allergy worse. Nasal sprays, for example, irritate the mucus membranes. In response to the irritation, the membranes produce more mucus. The spray actually aggravates the problem that it is designed to solve. Side-effects of the common antihistamines include fatigue, dry mouth and headaches. There is even some evidence that antihistamines may be linked to an increased chance of cancer (see the article on the back page).

The biggest problem with drug therapy is that it does not address the cause of the allergy. Drugs have been the mainstay of allergy treatment, but the number of people with allergies keeps increasing and symptoms keep getting worse. The good news is that there are many things you can do to *naturally* relieve allergy symptoms.

TREAT ALLERGIES NATURALLY

Allergy symptoms are basically due to inflammation, so addressing core health issues, like diet, will improve them. Researchers in Finland found that the type of fats consumed in the diet was related to the tendency to develop allergic symptoms. The results were published in the journal *Allergy* (2001;56:425-428). Other research, appearing in the journal *Thorax* (2007;62:677-683) found a relationship between the occurrence of asthma and allergies, and diet. A Mediterranean type of diet, high in fresh produce, is associated with less potential for an allergic response. Produce is high in flavonoids. Flavonoids are plant antioxidants (found in fresh produce) that have anti-inflammatory and anti-tumor activity. The *Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry* (2006; 54(14): 5203-7) noted that a flavonoid was found to reduce inflammatory substances resulting from an allergic reaction.

In general, taking omega-3 fatty acids is beneficial. Research that appeared in the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* (December, 2003;112(6):1178-84) found that pregnant women who took omega-3 fatty acids were less likely to have babies with allergies than women who did not take the supplement.

Even exercise plays a role. A study, published in *Allergy* (Vol. 61, No. 11, November 2006: 1310-1315) looked at exercise and activity levels in 1,700 German children over a period of 12 years. At the start of the study, 6% of the children were completely sedentary. At the end of the 12 years, the sedentary children were 50% more likely to develop hay fever.

Various herbs can support patients with allergies:

***Fritillaria thunbergii*:** (*Fritillaria*) is an antitussive herb (cough suppressant). It has a bronchodilation effect and inhibits mucosal secretions. *Fritillaria*'s traditional use is for relief of coughing and dyspnea (*The Pharmacology of Chinese Herbs*, pg 275-6). *Fritillaria* tends to act in a manner that is similar to dexamethasone, which is used to treat nasal allergy and inflammation.

Solidago virgaurea supplies flavonoids, saponins and phenol glycosides. *S. virgaurea* is primarily used to promote the loss of water (aquaretic agent) from the body.

Scutellaria baicalensis (Baikal Scullcap) possesses anti-inflammatory, anti-bacterial, and anti-allergic properties

Euphrasia officinalis (Eyebright) – The German Commission E Monographs lists the use of Eyebright to include inflamed eyes, coughs, colds and catarrh (inflammation of mucous membrane). It is useful if an allergic response is the basis for sinusitis (*Clinical Botanical Medicine*, pg 209).

Morus alba (White Mulberry) In Chinese Medicine, *M. alba* is used to tonify the blood and enrich the yin (*Chinese Herbal Medicines Materia Medica*, pg 334-5). It is used as a tonic and as an expectorant for asthma, bronchitis, cold and cough and dyspepsia. The fruit also contains a significant amount of resveratrol. Interestingly,

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the leaves happen to be the primary food source for the silkworm.

Platycodon grandiflorum (Chinese bellflower). Traditional uses are to dispel phlegm, to ventilate the lungs, and to relieve sore throat. In traditional Chinese Medicine, it is often used in combination with other herbs in order to direct the actions of other herbs to the upper body.

Albizia julibrissin (Silk Tree) has sweet, neutral properties and contains saponins and tannins. It is calming, i.e. it “calms the spirit” (Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica, pg 406-7), and is considered an “auspicious tree.” It is also used as a tonic and anthelmintic or vermifuge (Li Shih-Chen, Chinese Medicinal Herbs, pg 22-3).

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FLAVONOIDS

Flavonoids are a class of water-soluble plant pigments found in fruits, vegetables, and certain beverages which possess antioxidant effects. Antioxidants are compounds that protect cells against the damaging effects of reactive chemicals known as free radicals. Free radicals can cause oxidative stress, leading to cellular damage.

Flavonoids help provide protection against allergies and other diseases by contributing to the total antioxidant defense system of the human body. Studies have shown that flavonoid intake is inversely related to mortality from coronary heart disease and to the incidence of heart attacks.

In a study published in the *Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry* (2006; 54(14): 5203-7), involving mice, the flavonoid apigenin, was found to reduce inflammatory substances produced by an allergic reaction. Flavonoids are plant antioxidants that have anti-inflammatory and anti-tumor activity. Apigenin is found in high amounts in several herbs including parsley, thyme, and peppermint.

In this study, the mice were divided into two groups, a control group and an active group. The active group was given apigenin as part of their diet for two weeks. IgE (immunoglobulin E), which is

associated with allergies, was significantly lower in the mice receiving apigenin. Inflammatory substances associated with allergies (certain cytokines) were also lower in the supplemented group.

According to an article appearing in *Curr Pharm Des.*2(014;20(6):973-87) Preclinical studies, carried out in mainly in rodents, suggest that flavonoids may have a role in the prevention of immunoglobulin E (IgE) synthesis and mast cell degranulation. Interestingly, using animal models with allergic asthma, it can be concluded that preventive treatment with particular flavonoid classes can reduce airway hyperresponsiveness, which in turn is accompanied by lowered inflammatory mediators such as histamine and cytokines, and cell infiltration. In addition, there are some clinical trials in patients with allergic asthma or rhinitis that offer promising results with regard to these natural compounds.

According to *Br J Pharmacol* (2005 Aug;145(7):934-44), mast cells participate in allergies, and also in immunity and inflammation by secreting proinflammatory cytokines. Flavonoids are naturally occurring polyphenolic plant compounds, one group of which – the flavonols, inhibits histamine and some cytokine release from rodent basophils and mast cells.

**Health is the
greatest gift,
contentment
the greatest
wealth,
faithfulness the
best
relationship.**

Buddha

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IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN ANTIHISTAMINES AND CANCER?

Research published in *Science News* (1994;145:324) raises the question of whether the antihistamines we take for allergies can be linked to cancer. Studies in mice have shown that antihistamines promote the growth of malignant tumors. Scientists at the University of Manitoba believe that the consumption of various medications, including antihistamines and antidepressants, may increase the risk for cancer. In February, 1994, the Department of Health and Human Services noted an increase in the incidence of cancer in the United States. Scientists at the University of Manitoba believe that the consumption of various medications, including antihistamines and antidepressants, may increase the risk for cancer and may be part of the reason for the increase. They demonstrated that drugs like Elavil, Claritin, Hismanal, Atarax, Unisom, Prozac, NyQuil and Reactine, all created tumors in animal studies.

Some antihistamines behave like the drug DPPE, which has been linked to enhancing tumor growth. They do this by binding to histamine receptors, which, in turn interferes with enzymes designed to detoxify and remove poisons from the body. This also interferes with the system that regulates cell growth. The drugs do not necessarily cause cancer, but can enhance the growth of cancer.

There are so many natural approaches to allergy treatment. Improving the diet can reduce overall inflammation. Flavonoids can help protect membranes from oxidative stress, while there are a number of herbal products that can help mitigate allergy symptoms naturally.

One of the most frustrating symptoms of allergies is itchy eyes. This can commonly be brought under control by taking some vitamin A.