

symptoms to some extent. Also realized that a healthy life style and things like yoga can cure pollen allergy / hay fever completely.

I started drinking lot of water and started eating vitamin c rich food quite often. Also I started washing my hair before going to bed. Also I started avoiding oily / fatty food. These things did not provide immediate cure. Even after the pollen season, I continued with the above mentioned things such as drinking enough water, eating healthy food also I started doing yoga.

When the pollen season started again the symptoms came back again, but it lasted only for 2 weeks compared to 2 months in the previous years. That was really a good improvement. But still those 2 weeks were quite bad. Stuffed nose and coughing were the worst things.

In the next year I started using Nasivin for the stuffed nose and it really helped a lot to relieve my stuffed nose. I could get Nasivin over the counter and I was told that I should not use Nasivin for more than 2 weeks. This time severe pollen allergy lasted for bit more than a week. For coughing I started using an Indian home remedy which is mixing 4-5 black whole peppers with some rice and taking the mixture in the mouth, biting it and holding the mixture in the mouth.

Again this year I had pollen allergy for 1-2 weeks. But again with same techniques which are described in the previous paragraph, I could avoid its severity. Hopefully, if I continue doing yoga and healthier lifestyle, at some point I may be able to completely overcome pollen allergy.

Tips to cure pollen allergy:

I have written the above mentioned things and I am writing the following things just based on my experience. Please consult your physician before doing anything based on the writing here.

During pollen season, as soon as you come home try to change your clothes and wash your hair or have bath.

Vacuum clean your house regularly, at least once a day.

Do not spend too much time outside during pollen season.

Do not leave your window open for long duration.

Drink lot of water.

Try to eat vitamin c rich food, even during pollen free days.

Try to avoid fatty / oily food.

Do yoga regularly. I would recommend surya namaskar (sun salutation) and couple of more poses.

If possible, try to do also pranayama (breathing exercise).

Remember, it may take many years to completely cure pollen allergy. We need to do these things consistently to overcome pollen allergy.

Though I am doing all the above things, I also take antihistamine tablets, eye drops and nasivin nose spray for few days to have better days during pollen season. Also try to consult your physician before taking Nasivin.

To reduce coughing I take mixture of 4-5 black pepper pieces along with hand full of rice and take it in my mouth bite the mixture and hold it for several minutes and drop the juice slowly to my throat. I keep it in my mouth and spit it after a while.

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NATURAL ALLERGY REMEDIES - (By Lynn Keiley - August/September 2006)

Allergies plague millions of people, and many only get marginal relief from drugs, which can also have frustrating side effects. Natural remedies, however, often have fewer side effects, and can combat allergic reactions to plants such as the notorious ragweed, shown here.



As the golden days of summer begin to fade, thoughts often turn to the last sun-ripened tomatoes and bringing in the harvest. But if you or someone you know are among the more than 26 million Americans who suffer from seasonal allergies (or the estimated 50 million

who suffer from all types of allergies), you may be focused more on pollen counts, the first freeze, and stocking up on tissues and allergy meds than on harvesting tomatoes.

Members of the sniffing, sneezing and itching allergy demographic typically rely on numerous drugs and sprays for relief — often with mixed results. Many pharmaceutical treatments relieve sneezing and itching, but do little to treat congestion, and vice versa. In fact, at a recent meeting of the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, Dr. William E. Berger reported that nearly a third of allergy patients think their medications don't work. Plus, pharmaceutical remedies are often expensive and frequently come with unwanted side effects, such as drowsiness and nasal irritation. The sedative effects of these drugs can impair driving ability and because a mental disconnects that many users find irritating.

Annual bouts with pollen aren't just uncomfortable; they also take a toll on mental well-being. Studies have shown that during ragweed season, allergy sufferers often experience a general sense of fatigue — especially mental fatigue — and are more prone to feelings of sadness. People who suffer from allergies also are up to 14 times more likely to experience migraine headaches than those who don't have allergies.

Given these statistics, you might want to pull the covers over your head and wait until the whole season blows over. But it is possible to step outdoors safely without first loading up on allergy medications, even when ragweed is in full bloom. Here are several natural alternatives that are medically proven to help control allergies and help you breathe easier, even when pollen counts are at their worst.

Understanding Allergies

When you understand what's happening during allergy attacks, treating them naturally seems like plain common sense. First, picture a grain of pollen — it looks something like a spiny sea urchin (see photo 3 in Image Gallery). Now imagine this prickly invader entering your nasal passages and latching onto soft mucous membranes. These mucous membranes line our bronchial and nasal passages and contain immune cells, called mast cells, which are loaded with histamines. Receptors sit on top of these mast cells, and when an allergen trigger — such as pollen, mold or pet dander — lands on top of the receptor, it alerts the mast cells, which respond by releasing histamine and other chemicals. The histamine initiates a series of reactions designed to help the body get rid of the intruder, including sneezing, watery eyes and itching. For some people, particularly those with asthma, this reaction may also include swelling in the bronchial tubes that makes it difficult to breathe.

Most allergy medications attempt to treat the symptoms your body instigates to get rid of the allergen. But doesn't it make more sense to shore up your defenses before your body

goes into attack mode? Many of the natural remedies discussed below are designed to prevent a reaction before it occurs.

A few minor lifestyle changes also can go a long way toward keeping symptoms under control:

Avoid using window fans to cool rooms, because they can pull pollen indoors.

Keep windows closed when driving, using the air conditioner if necessary, to avoid allergens.

Limit your time outdoors when ragweed pollen counts are highest — from mid-August until the first frost.

Here are more things that can help head off allergies before they start, as well as some drug-free ways to treat symptoms when they do arise.

Neti Pots.

What could be simpler than rinsing away allergens with saltwater? Neti pots, small vessels shaped like Aladdin's lamp (see the Image Gallery), have been used in India for thousands of years to flush the sinuses and keep them clear. It's an idea that takes some getting used to for most Westerners, but it's a bit like using nasal spray. A little douse of saltwater can rinse away those prickly pollen grains and help treat allergies and other forms of sinus congestion.

Just last year, an Italian study published in the International Archives of Allergy and Immunology found that nasal flushing was a mild and effective way to treat seasonal allergies in children, and markedly reduced their use of antihistamines.

You could simply use your cupped hand instead of a neti pot to rinse sinuses, but netis are inexpensive, and many people find them much easier to use. To flush your sinuses, mix a quarter to a half teaspoon of noniodized table salt into a cup of lukewarm water and pour it into the pot. (You can adjust the amount of salt, depending on what feels most comfortable.) Lean over a sink with your head slightly cocked to one side, then put the spout of the neti into one nostril and allow the water to drain out the other nostril. Use about half of the solution, then repeat on the other side, tilting your head the opposite way. Gently blow out each nostril to clear them completely. Neti pots are widely available online and at natural food stores. Use your pot about twice a day during allergy season, especially in the morning and after spending time outdoors. You also can use a neti pot before bed to prevent snoring caused by allergies and promote optimal overnight breathing.

Quercetin.

A natural plant-derived compound called a bioflavonoid, quercetin helps stabilize mast cells and prevents them from releasing histamine. Quercetin also is a natural antioxidant that helps mop up molecules called free radicals that cause cell damage, which can lead to cancer. Citrus fruits, onions, apples, parsley, tea, tomatoes, broccoli, lettuce and wine are naturally

high in quercetin, but allergy sufferers will most likely need to use supplements to build up enough of this compound to prevent attacks. The recommended dosage is about 1,000 milligrams a day, taken between meals. It's best to start treatment six weeks before allergy season. Those with liver disease shouldn't use quercetin, so please consult your doctor before using this or any other supplement — especially if you are pregnant or nursing.

Allergy-Fighting Foods.

A German study, published in the journal *Allergy*, found that participants who ate foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids were less likely to suffer allergy symptoms than those who didn't regularly eat these foods. Omega-3s help fight inflammation and can be found in cold-water fish, walnuts and flaxseed oil, as well as grass-fed meat and eggs.

To help keep airways clear when pollen counts are high, add a dash of horseradish, chili peppers or hot mustard to your food — all act as natural, temporary decongestants. It's also a good idea to avoid foods that you're slightly allergic to until the air clears. Fighting off allergies can render the body hypersensitive to those foods, causing more severe reactions than usual.

Stinging Nettle.

If you decide you need an antihistamine but want a natural option, stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*) behaves in much the same way as many of the drugs sold to treat allergies, but without the unwanted side effects of dry mouth and drowsiness. Nettle actually inhibits the body's ability to produce histamine. It's a common weed in many parts of the United States, but the most practical medicinal form is a freeze-dried extract of the leaves sold in capsules. Studies have shown that taking about 300 milligrams daily will offer relief for most people, although the effects may last only a few hours. You also can make your own tinctures or teas with stinging nettle. (Contact with the stinging hairs on fresh nettle can cause skin inflammation, so wear protective gloves when handling it.) For more on making your own herbal remedies, see Richo Cech's *Making Plant Medicine* (Horizon Herbs, 2000).

Butterbur.

Derived from a common weed in Europe, butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*) is another alternative to antihistamines, though it may be hard to find in the United States. In the days before refrigeration, its broad, floppy leaves were used to wrap butter during warm spells, hence the name butterbur. A Swiss study, published in *British Journal of Medicine*, found that butterbur was as effective as the drug cetirizine, the active ingredient in Zyrtec. Even though cetirizine is supposed to be a non-sedative antihistamine, researchers reported that it did cause drowsiness, though butterbur did not. Participants in the study took 32 milligrams of butterbur a day, divided into four doses. A word of caution though — butterbur is in the same

family as ragweed, so it could worsen allergy symptoms in some cases. Effects of taking butterbur over a long period of time also are unknown.

Sublingual Immunotherapy.

Specific immunotherapy, otherwise known as allergy shots, has been used widely to inject patients with diluted doses of certain allergens to help build immunity over time. However, allergy shots can take three to five years to be effective, and a small percentage of people suffer severe reactions to this treatment. Though it remains popular in North America, the practice fell out of favor in the United Kingdom during the late 1980s, when strict limitations were imposed after several adverse reactions occurred.

New studies have found a gentler way to acclimate the body to pollen and other allergens. The latest form of this therapy is called sublingual immunotherapy (SLIT), which has been used for the past 20 years in Europe. In SLIT treatments, patients put drops of a very small dose of the allergen (initially a 1:1,000 dilution) under the tongue for two minutes, then swallow. The daily therapy begins before peak pollen season for seasonal allergy sufferers, but also can be used to treat year-round allergies, though treatment must be specific to the type of allergen.

A recent study in the United Kingdom found that patients who used SLIT for two years were nearly seven times less likely to suffer runny noses, and almost three times less likely to experience sneezing, than those who took a placebo. Because an allergy extract has not been approved by the Food and Drug Administration for use in the United States, check with your doctor and insurance provider before considering SLIT therapy.

Whether you suffer from seasonal or ongoing allergies, these natural remedies should let you get out there and harvest those late tomatoes!

SOME OTHER PATIENTS EXPERIENCES

Mritunjay Yadav - I finally got rid of my allergies. It turns out they were caused by particles in the air. I got a system from Chicago Air Purification and it solved my allergy issues. I highly recommend them. Check out their site at <http://www.chicagoairpurification.com/>

Chris Barker - My allergies have been to Goldenrod and pollens in general. I have been having good luck with taking vitamin C. A couple of smaller doses a day seems to work for me. I would also consider any of the vitamins or herbs that boost my immune system.

Cindy Schuster - I have severe seasonal and pet (cat) allergies. I have used Super OPC Grapeseed Extract that I buy on I healthtree.com for years. I take it year round and it is so

wonderful at controlling my histamine response. I've found if I can keep my allergies under control I can keep my asthma under control also. I have also found fish oil extremely beneficial in controlling my asthma and am a new fan of flax seed. I am a new person inside (healthy bm every morning) and very mild hot flashes as I experience menopause. I have read a lot on allergies and based on what I've read I think they're caused by antibiotics taken in childhood destroying the good bacteria in the gut. Be very careful with antibiotics. They are devastating to the body.

TarasBook - Goldenrod tincture- seasonal and cat. Isn't it interesting how prolifically Goldenrod grows during fall allergy season?(this is not ragweed) it seems to me as if Mother Nature is saying, "Here you go, this will help!" Also, I've noticed that people "develop" allergies as adults. I think this is more due to the lack of wellness maintenance. Similarly in a vehicle, when it is not maintained and cleaned with oil changes and such, junk builds up. I find it to be the same with our bodies. Regular, safe detoxing helps prevent many ailments. Simply drinking plenty of clean water is a way to detox the body!

Richlund - A dehumidifier really helped my families' allergies. We purchased ours from <http://simplydehumidifiers.com> and are pleased. We are looking into buying an air purifier next. Does anyone have any recommendations? નોંધ: મારો પોતાનો પણ હ્યુમીડીફાયરનો ઉપયોગ ઘણો ફાયદો કરે એવો છે. પરંતુ તેમાં એક ખાસ કાળજી એ રાખવાની કે હ્યુમીડીફાયરને બને તો અઠવાડીએ એકવાર સાફ કરવું જોઈએ. નહીં તો એ ફાયડો કરવાની જગ્યાએ નુકશાન કરી શકે છે.

ManyMoss_2 - Hyper-response to pollen or any other natural substance is not normal. All the stated remedies attempt to treat the symptoms of allergies and not the cause, which is a compromised immune system. Outlining methods to improve immune function would result in a cure and not just a band aide.

Ed_24 - Dr Andrew Weil has been advocating nasal douching for at least 20 years. The simplest method is to wet a paper towel or rag, put in the entrance to your nose, then squeeze your nose which will inject a little water into the appropriate area. There are also many salt water preparations in most drugstores that come in little squeeze bottles. I used to have seasonal allergies. I started taking 1200mgs fish oil 3 times a day, eating walnuts and putting flax in my steel cut oats. Presto, no more allergies.

Vickie L. Jackson - Sublingual immunotherapy drops have been used since at least the '80s in Canada by Clinical Ecologists. When I suffered badly from allergies and chemical sensitivities

back then and was living in Ontario, I used them. No insurance will cover them, unfortunately, but they work quite well.

Michael Morgan - I Have found over the years drinking Goats Milk or cow's Milk from animals that have been grass fed or has eaten the offending vegetation. Drank over time (years) has reduced my allergies greatly.

P L - Tea with wild chamomile, lemon balm, natural local honey, and dandelion root/leaves/blossoms. The other stuff treats nasal and respiratory stuff, but the honey acts to build up an immunity to the pollens.

Marcus_1- I also have recently discovered nasal irrigation. However the product that my doctor recommended was Nasopure. It has helped me very much and I no longer get frequent colds. Unlike other products Nasopure allows you to be upright during the rinse which allows for a more effective flush. Their website www.nasopure.com is very informative

Saline nasal spray

I used medicated nasal sprays for over 20 years not knowing that they were addictive or that they could mess up the lining of my nose. I did so in an effort to treat my allergies. Since then, I've switched to a saline nasal spray and it really helps. Saline sprays help to clear the pollen out of your nasal cavity, as well as helping to thin and reduce the mucous in your nose. Less pollen in the nose and thinner mucous means that you can breathe easier. I can say from personal experience, that a saline nasal spray has done more for my allergies than even antihistamines in some cases.

Goldenseal

A goldenseal tonic has antibacterial and astringent properties. When used with a saline nasal spray, Goldenseal can greatly reduce the symptoms of pollen allergies.

Hot and spicy foods

Hot spicy foods thin the mucous secretions in your nose, thus making your nose clearer. This means you are able to breathe more easily. In fact, the hotter and spicier the food is the better!

Sinus Buster made with natural hot pepper extract

Working on the same principal as eating hot and spicy foods, Sinus Buster is a nasal spray that delivers natural hot pepper extract straight to your nose and thins the mucous caused by pollen allergies. Many people who want a natural remedy for pollen allergies swear by it.

Use eye drops.

I use rewetting eye drops for the same reason as the nasal spray — the drops flush the bad things out of my eyes. It really helps with my itchy eyes.

Eat local honey.

I alternate between clover honey and wildflower honey to build up my resistance to both. One is primarily for spring allergies and the other for fall, but I use them both all year just to cover the bases.

Drink apple cider vinegar.

Apple cider vinegar is one of those cure-all home remedies that's been around forever and is praised for helping with all sorts of things from sinus infections and weight loss, to gout and hot flashes.

I was very hesitant to start this one, but my sinus infections were so frequent that I had to do something. It sounded plain gross to me, but it really isn't bad. And this is coming from someone who cannot even stand the smell of vinegar.

I mix 1 teaspoon of apple cider vinegar (the kind that is not filtered and has the mother of vinegar in it) with 1 heaping teaspoon of local honey and 8 oz of hot water. You can add more honey to taste. Drink it up twice a day.

Lymphatic Drainage Massage.

I get a massage at Massage Envy each month. As a part of my massage, she does a lymphatic drainage treatment around my neck.

It isn't the most relaxing part because it really gets "stuff" moving in my head and I usually start coughing or sneezing in the middle of it. But it does seem to work.

Q: Why are some people allergic to pollen while others are not?

A: People inherit a tendency to be allergic, meaning an increased likelihood of being allergic to one or more allergens (such as pollen), although they probably do not inherit a tendency to be allergic to any specific allergens. Children are much more likely to develop allergies if their parents have allergies, even if only one parent is allergic. Exposure to allergens at certain times when the body's defenses are lowered or weakened, such as after a viral infection or during pregnancy, also seems to contribute to the development of allergies.

Q: Which trees and grasses produce the most allergens?

A: Plain-looking trees, grasses and weeds, which do not have showy flowers, produce the types of pollen that most commonly cause allergic reactions. These plants manufacture small, light, dry pollen granules that are custom-made for wind transport. Although most allergenic pollen comes from plants that produce it in huge quantities, it's the chemical makeup of the pollen that determines whether it is likely to cause hay fever.

Local Conditions

Q: Where can I get information on the pollen count where I live?

A: The National Allergy Bureau monitors pollen counts in many locations throughout the United States. Their phone number for pollen counts is 1-800-9-POLLEN.

Q: What time of day and weather conditions are worst for people with pollen allergy?

A: Generally, pollen is most abundant in the early morning, especially between 5:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. Other considerations, however, also determine exposure, such as wind velocity. Also, rain can wash pollen out of the air for a time, and some plants may not pollinate in damp weather.

Testing, Treatment, and Management

Q: How can I get tested to find out if I have pollen allergy?

A: A doctor can use a skin test to see if you will react to specific pollen allergens. A diluted extract is injected under the patient's skin or is applied to a tiny scratch or puncture made on the arm or back. Skin testing is the most common method used to test for allergic reactions. Blood tests are also available to determine if you have a pollen allergy.

Q: As an allergic person, is there anything I can do in my environment and activities to minimize my reaction to pollen?

A: Avoiding exposure to pollen is the best way to decrease allergic symptoms.

Remain indoors in the morning when outdoor pollen levels are highest.

Wear face masks designed to filter out pollen if you must be outdoors.

Keep windows closed and use the air conditioner if possible in the house and car.

Do not dry clothes outdoors.

Avoid unnecessary exposure to other environmental irritants such as insect sprays, tobacco smoke, air pollution, and fresh tar or paint.

Avoid mowing the grass or doing other yard work, if possible.

Q: What are the best treatments for pollen allergy?

A: The best treatment for pollen allergy is to avoid coming into contact with pollen. Because that is usually not possible, certain medications can control allergic reactions in most people. Several oral antihistamine medications are available over-the-counter or by a doctor's prescription. Topical nasal steroid sprays are anti-inflammatory drugs that stop the allergic rhinitis. Using a combination of antihistamines and nasal steroids can effectively treat allergic symptoms, especially in people with moderate or severe allergic symptoms.

Cromolyn sodium, a nasal spray, helps prevent allergic reactions from starting. It significantly helps some people with allergies.

Oral and nasal decongestants reduce congestion sometimes caused by the allergic reaction. Doctors sometimes recommend their use along with an antihistamine which controls the allergic symptoms. Nose drops and sprays, however, should not be used for more than a few days at a time because they can lead to even more congestion and swelling of the nasal passages.

Q: Allergy drugs make me sleepy. Is there anything I can take that won't do that?

A: There are several non-sedating antihistamines on the market that are available with a doctor's prescription.

Q: Can I take shots to get rid of my pollen allergy?

A: Immunotherapy, or a series of allergy shots, is the only available treatment that has a chance of reducing allergy symptoms over the long term. About 80 percent of people with hay fever will have a significant reduction in their symptoms and in their need for medication within 12 months of starting allergy shots.

Q: Do air filters help?

A: Various types of air-filtering devices made with fiberglass or electrically charged plates may help reduce pollen allergens. An allergy specialist can suggest which kind of filter is best for your home.

Q: Should I consider moving to another geographic area where I would have less exposure to the trees, grasses, etc., that I am allergic to?

A: Most people who relocate to get away from the pollens that cause their allergic symptoms find that they eventually develop allergies to the plant pollens in the new area. In addition, other airborne allergens, such as dust or mold, in the new area also might cause allergic rhinitis in a person. Therefore, doctors usually do not recommend that their patients move.

Research

Q: What new treatments and vaccines are being studied?

A: New treatments under investigation include anti-IgE, a compound designed to block IgE antibodies, which are produced in massive quantities by allergic individuals. Researchers also are exploring the use of agents designed to antagonize other molecules that participate in allergic reactions. An exciting area of vaccine research involves the use of DNA encoding allergy-inducing substances. Other researchers are developing allergy vaccines composed of molecularly modified allergens.

Q: Has the number of individuals with allergies been increasing in recent years?

A: There are very little data available on this issue. Some researchers hypothesize that environmental pollutants can stimulate the immune system in such a way as to make people more vulnerable to allergies. Still, there is insufficient evidence at this time to say that allergies have truly increased within the population. This question requires additional study. Any increase in new commercial products, anecdotal stories, etc., does not necessarily mean that there is a scientifically proven increase in the rate of allergies.

Source: National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Institutes of Health, February 2000

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How is pollen allergy diagnosed?

People with a pollen allergy may at first suspect they have a summer cold - but the "cold" lingers on. For any respiratory illness that lasts longer than a week or two, it is important to see a doctor. When it appears that the symptoms are caused by an allergy, the patient should see a physician who understands the diagnosis and treatment of allergies. If the patient's medical history indicates that the symptoms recur at the same time each year, the physician will work under the hypothesis that a seasonal allergen like pollen is involved.

Skin Tests

A doctor is performing an allergy skin test

To find out which types of pollen are responsible, skin testing may be recommended using pollens commonly found in the local area. A diluted extract of each kind of pollen is applied to a scratch or puncture made on the patient's arm or back or injected under the patient's skin. With a positive reaction, a small, raised, reddened area with a surrounding flush (called a wheal and flare) will appear at the test site. The size of the wheal can provide the physician with an important reaction diagnostic clue, but a positive reaction does not prove that a particular pollen is the cause of a patient's symptoms.

Blood Tests

Skin testing is not advisable in some patients such as those with certain skin conditions. Diagnostic tests can be done using a blood sample from the patient to detect levels of IgE antibody to a particular allergen. One such blood test is called the RAST (radioallergosorbent test). Although the RAST offers some advantages over skin testing, it is expensive to perform, takes several weeks to yield results, and is somewhat less sensitive. Skin testing remains the most sensitive and least costly diagnostic tool.

How is pollen allergy treated?

There are three general approaches to the treatment of pollen allergy:

Avoidance of the allergen

Medication to relieve symptoms

Immunotherapy or injection treatments (commonly called allergy shots).

Although no cure for pollen allergy has yet been found, one of these strategies or a combination of them can provide various degrees of relief from allergy symptoms.

Avoidance

Complete avoidance of allergenic pollen means moving to a place where the offending plant does not grow and where its pollen is not present in the air. But even this extreme solution may offer only temporary relief since a person who is sensitive to one specific weed, tree, or grass pollen may often develop allergies to others after repeated exposure. Thus, persons allergic to ragweed may leave their ragweed-ridden communities and relocate to areas where ragweed does not grow, only to develop allergies to other weeds or even to grasses and trees in their new surroundings. Because relocating is not a reliable solution, allergy specialists strongly discourage this approach.

There are other ways to evade the offending pollen:

Remain indoors when the outdoor pollen levels are highest. Sunny, and windy days can be especially troublesome. Avoid intense outdoor activities, such as exercise or strenuous work, during the early morning and late afternoon hours when pollen counts are highest.

If persons with pollen allergy must work outdoors, they can wear a pollen and dust mask. Face masks are designed to filter pollen out of the air reaching person's nasal passages.

As another approach, some people take their vacations at the height of the expected pollinating period and choose a location where such exposure would be minimal. The seashore, for example, may be an effective retreat for many with pollen allergies.

Wash your hair before going to bed to avoid getting pollen on your pillow.

Use a clothes dryer instead of hanging the wash outside, where it acts as a filter trap for pollen.

Air cleaners. Use of air conditioners and purifiers inside the home or in a car can be quite helpful in reducing pollen levels. Make sure to clean and replace your air conditioner and air cleaner filters regularly. Also effective are various types of air-filtering devices, which can be added to the heating and cooling systems in the home.

Avoiding irritants. During periods of high pollen levels, people with pollen allergy should try to avoid unnecessary exposure to irritants such as dust, insect sprays, tobacco smoke, air pollution, and fresh tar or paint. Any of these can aggravate the symptoms of pollen allergy.

You can find more hints in the article on minimizing your exposure to pollen.

Medication Treatment

For people with seasonal allergies who find they cannot avoid pollen, the symptoms can often be controlled with medication available by prescription or over the counter:

Antihistamines. As the name indicates, an antihistamine counters the effects of histamine, which contributes to the allergy symptoms. For many years, antihistamines have proven useful in relieving sneezing and itching in the nose, throat, and eyes and in reducing nasal swelling and drainage. Unfortunately, many people who take antihistamines experience some distressing side effects: drowsiness and loss of alertness and coordination.

Nasal Decongestants. Over-the-counter products containing decongestants can be helpful in relieving blocked nasal passages. These drugs constrict the blood vessels in nasal tissue, lessening swelling and mucus production. Because these drugs can raise blood pressure, increase the heart rate, and cause nervousness in some people, persons with allergies should check with their doctors before using decongestants. People with allergic rhinitis should avoid using decongestant nasal sprays because frequent or prolonged use can lead to a

"rebound phenomenon", in which the initial effect of shrinking the nasal passages is followed by increased swelling and congestion. When this occurs, a person often will use the spray in higher doses, or more frequently, in an attempt to get relief from congestion. Instead of improving nasal congestion, however, such use of nasal sprays only intensifies the problem.

Corticosteroids. Until recently, corticosteroids, although very effective in controlling allergic disorders, were not widely used for pollen allergy because their prolonged use can result in serious side effects. Corticosteroids relieve the symptoms of pollen allergy by reducing nasal inflammation and inhibiting mucus production. Locally active steroids are now available as nasal sprays in measured-dose spray bottles. When used this way, the drug affects only the nasal passages rather than the entire body. The side effects, which are minimal when the spray is used in recommended doses, can include nasal burning and dryness and a sore throat.

Cromolyn sodium. Another effective agent that is available by prescription as a nasal solution. Unlike antihistamines or steroids, cromolyn sodium is believed to control allergic symptoms by preventing histamine release. In clinical trials, cromolyn sodium has been proven safe and effective and, in contrast to some other allergy medications, appears to cause no drowsiness. Unlike antihistamines and decongestants, corticosteroid nasal sprays and cromolyn sodium nasal solutions must be used for several days to weeks before there is any noticeable reduction in symptoms.

At-Home Treatments

Nasal Irrigation is a safe and effective practice that can (and probably should) be performed daily. Also called jala neti, it began as an ancient practice in India and is now practiced worldwide. Nasal irrigation uses salt water to flush bacteria and dried mucus out of the nose and sinuses.

Saline sprays look very much like nasal decongestant sprays, but instead of medication they contain a specially mixed saline solution. The solution moisturizes dry and irritated mucous membranes. Saline sprays do not flush out the nasal and sinus passages as much as a full irrigation.

Steam inhalation is often used to break up mucus and reduce congestion. Steam can soothe and moisturize irritated nasal and sinus membranes, and unlike nasal irrigation it also helps soothe sore throats and chest congestion.

Aromatherapy is often used with steam inhalation to provide extra relief. Aromatherapy takes essential oils (usually a combination of eucalyptus, lavender, peppermint, tea tree oil, and rosemary) and uses them to produce a soothing vapor that helps to alleviate allergy symptoms. While you can mix your own aromatherapy oils, it is recommended that you buy a product with the oils already mixed for you, that way you can ensure it having the proper balance of oils.

Immunotherapy (Injection Treatments)

If environmental control methods and medication prove to be inadequate to control a person's symptoms, a physician may recommend immunotherapy (commonly called allergy shots). The aim of this treatment is to increase the patient's tolerance to the particular pollen to which he or she is allergic.

Diluted extracts of the pollen are injected under the patient's skin. The patient receives small doses once or twice a week, working up to larger doses that are given less often. The size of the largest dose depends on the patient's tolerance and the treatment's effect on the patient's allergy symptoms. Since it takes time to build up tolerance, prolonged treatment may be needed before the patient's symptoms are relieved.

Immunotherapy is not without problems. It can be expensive, and may require months before improvement is apparent. Further, it does not work well for some people and, if the size of the dose or frequency of shots is not carefully monitored, the injections can cause allergic reactions. These reactions can be quite mild - redness and swelling at the site of the injection - or potentially serious systemic reactions such as hives, generalized swelling, or shock.

What if pollen allergy is not treated?

As anyone with allergies knows, allergic symptoms are annoying and, in severe cases, debilitating. As a rule, however, an allergy to pollen does not progress to serious pulmonary or other diseases. Occasionally, when pollen allergy is not treated, complications may occur. These include swelling of the nasal passages and eustachian tubes leading to the ears, which may prevent proper drainage and airflow and lead to secondary infection of the sinuses or to middle ear problems.

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