

Summertime Allergies

The living is sneezy!!!

For most people the onset of spring with its warmer weather, blossoming trees and blooming flowers is a welcome change from the winter months. But for those who experience hay fever it means stocking up on the tissues and the start of several months of sneezing, itchy, watery eyes and runny noses.

What causes Hay fever?

Hay fever is an allergic response to pollen. Symptoms can arrive with tree pollens from March to May, depending on the climate, and continue through the summer months with grass pollens. Exposure to these air born allergens is made worse by the fact that when the weather is warmer windows are left open and we spend more time outside.

Pro-inflammatory histamine is responsible for the symptoms of hay fever. When the pollens come into contact with nostrils, eyes, or throat, the immune system responds by releasing histamine from mast cells. This is an inflammatory trigger to the body and initiates increased mucus production, contracts smooth muscle and encourages the dilation of blood vessels contributing to our typical hay fever symptoms. Itching is caused by the effect of histamine on nerve endings.

Nutritional Treatment of Hay fever

The best approach is to alleviate the irritating symptoms and to support the immune system through diet and supplementation; whilst at the same time reducing exposure to the triggers. It is important to start your anti-hay fever regime early on in the season. Following the dietary advice below boost the immune system and reduces symptoms such as mucus and itching later on in the summer. Many hay fever sufferers say that this approach has a cumulative, protective effect. In other words their hay fever has become increasingly better year after year by following dietary and supplement advice from as early as spring each year.

Increase:

- Beta-carotene and Vitamin C rich foods – These include bright red, orange, yellow and dark green vegetables and fruit. Vitamin C can reduce overall histamine production, and is therefore considered to be a natural antihistamine and anti-inflammatory. Beta-carotene is a precursor to vitamin A, which boosts the integrity of the mucous membrane. All fruit and vegetables are also good sources of other antioxidants; these include vitamins A, C, E, zinc and selenium and are vital to support the immune system.

- Essential Fatty Acids – Eat foods rich in omega 3 and 6 essential fats, these can be found in oily fish, nuts, seeds, and their oils. These contain prostaglandins, hormone like chemicals with anti-inflammatory properties, and may help reduce symptoms of hay fever.
- Garlic and Onions – These are a good source of quercetin, another powerful anti-inflammatory that stabilizes the membranes of the cells that release histamine and therefore allergic symptoms. Garlic and onions also boost the immune system by increasing production of white blood cells, which deal with allergic reactions. Quercetin can also be found in blue-green algae, spirulina, chlorella and kelp.
- Ginger also slows histamine production and a few slices can be put in hot water with lemon or added to cooking.
- Bromelain in pineapple and nuts is also useful in boosting the anti-inflammatory prostaglandins, it may be better in supplement form as these foods are fairly common allergens.

Avoid:

- Stay away from possible allergens - Try to avoid foods to which you may be allergic or intolerant, as these may increase histamine production. The most common food intolerances are wheat, dairy, and citrus fruit, so excluding these from your diet for a trial period may help. Wheat and dairy may also cause an increase in mucous production and therefore aggravate the problem
- Saturated Fats – Red meat, dairy and sugary foods containing saturated fats contain pro-inflammatory substances that can aggravate symptoms and increase mucus production.

Methods of Reducing Exposure

- Stay indoors during early morning or late evening – most pollen is released at these times.
- Avoid cutting grass, walking through cut grass or leaving windows open when lawns are being mowed.
- Keep windows closed while driving.
- Have frequent showers - splashing your face with cold water and bathing your eyes will help to wash away the irritants.
- Wash your hair and clothes as soon as you get home after a high pollen count day.
- Wear sunglasses to keep pollen grains out of your eyes.
- Applying a barrier ointment such as petroleum jelly into the base of the nostrils helps to trap the pollen and prevents it from irritating the lining of the nose.
- Air purifiers and ionisers can reduce overall pollen levels indoors.