



## Allergy Test by: Karen Asp



Every spring for as long as Julie Daly can remember, seasonal allergies would leave her with chronic sinus pain, postnasal drip and debilitating headaches. For years, under an allergist's guidance, she took prescription allergy medication, and while that helps ease some of her symptoms, her allergies never really went away—and the drug came with a host of not-so-pleasant side effects.

Frustrated, Daly finally saw a naturopathic doctor and got some shocking news: Her love of sweets and her high-stress lifestyle had more of an effect on her symptoms than the daily pollen count. So Daly took her new doctor's advice to heart: She cut out wheat and sugar, started running every other day, and took at least one yoga class a week—and it worked. "I couldn't believe the results," says the 37 year old. Sure it took a while, but for the first time in years Daly managed to get through allergy season without being completely miserable. "Now that I have my diet and stress levels under control," she says, "I realize my allergy symptoms were telling me that things were out of balance in my body,"

For the roughly 20 percent of the adults who suffer from seasonal allergies, results like Daly's can seem like a pipe dream, particularly during allergy season. But the obvious suspects—

pollen or ragweed—are merely triggers in the allergy bomb. The real culprit may actually be your immune system. "An allergy is essentially an exaggerated reaction of your immune system," says Holly Lucille, ND, RN, a naturopathic doctor in Los Angeles, who says that anybody with a compromised immune system—even someone who's never experienced symptoms before—can suffer from seasonal allergies.

How can something designed to protect you—your immunize system—cause you so much grief? By being overworked, that's how. If the immune system is on constant alert combating food allergies, stress, toxins in the environment, and even prescription medications, it begins to lose its ability to distinguish between dangerous invaders and relatively harmless things, such as pollen or dust.

"When your immune system is weak, it sees seasonal allergens as foreign bodies and launches an inflammatory response, releasing chemicals like histamine, to attack them," says Daniel Monti, MD, Director of the Jefferson-Myrna Brind Center of Integrative Medicine at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia and author of the *Great Life Makeover* (Collin Living, 2008). Histamines cause

the sneezing and coughing you associate with allergies—the mechanisms the body uses to expel the allergens. The amount of histamine your body releases depends on how compromised your immune system is. For instance, if your immune system is in good shape, your body may handle allergens without you even knowing it, says Lucille. If it's not, your body may release a flood of histamine, increasing the chance you'll be downright miserable.

So how do you prevent your immune system from overreacting? Begin by figuring out which of these five immune system stressors could be throwing it into overdrive.

### Allergy Trigger # 1: Your Diet

Adopting an anti-inflammatory diet is one of the first steps especially if you're already sensitive to a particular food. Two types of foods can cause an inflammatory reaction that overtaxes your immune system. First are the foods you can't digest well; ones you may not even know you have a problem with. The most common food allergies involve wheat, milk, eggs, and peanuts. Follow a diet that minimizes inflammation in your body and creates little or no stress on your immune system, however, and your body won't react so vio-

lently to external allergens.

The second type of inflammation-causing foods affect everyone—no food sensitivities needed—and include saturated fats, processed foods, and heavily refined carbohydrates. Cut out all of these products, especially during allergy season, and instead eat lots of fruits, veggies, and whole (gluten-free) grains.

Eliminate the suspect—wheat or dairy, for instance—for a week. On the eighth day, bring that food back and eat it three or four times for the next three days, watch for signs like increased mucus production, asthma-like symptoms, skin rashes, gas, bloating, heartburn, headaches, fatigue, or mood changes. If any of these symptoms arise, or you just don't feel as well as you did when you were avoiding the food, nix that food from your diet. Repeat this process with any other foods you suspect may cause you problems.

Two to four weeks may pass before you notice any relief. Also, unless you're allergic to the food—think peanut allergies or celiac disease—you may be able to add it back to your diet once allergy season has ended.

### Allergy Trigger # 2 Stress

Research has linked unrelenting stress from work, family, financial problems—or just from life in general—to a number of chronic diseases, but it has also discovered that stress can make your allergies worse. The hormones and other chemicals released during extended periods of stress cause damage that triggers an immune response. This can cause nutrient depletion as your body actually uses nutrients, including antioxidants and vitamins, to defend your body against stress. The more stress you have the more likely we are to make poor food choices and not enough sleep. When you think about it this way, you can see how stress throws the immune system off balance.

It's unrealistic to think you can ditch stress completely and still function in today's world, but getting regular exercise, enough sleep, and practicing mind-body techniques, such as yoga and meditation, can certainly help you manage it. Taking a daily multivitamin, and eating five to nine servings or more of fruits and veggies a day will also ensure that your immune system has an adequate arsenal of nutrients at hand.

### Allergy Trigger #3 Your Home

Use households have a least six detectable aller-

gens, all of which can float through the air and find their way into your body. These irritants include animal dander, dust mites, mold, scented candles, cleaning products, and cigarette smoke. Once again, these allergens probably won't spark much of a histamine reaction in a healthy immune system, but when it's hypersensitive they'll set off a host of five-alarm symptoms.

Using a nasal rinse once a day—twice if you're really suffering—to flush irritants out of your nasal passages can be helpful. You can buy a nasal rinse or make your own by adding a teasp. of salt and a pinch of baking soda to a quart of boiling water. Let the solution cool to body temperature before you put it in a neti pot to flush your nose. If the rinse burns, add a little more baking soda.

Dust Mites: Replacing carpeting with hardwood and limit upholstered items and fabric hangings like wall tapestries or drapes is helpful. Enclose pillows, mattresses, and box springs in allergen-proof covers, and wash bed sheets, mattress pads, and blankets in 130° water every week. Also, put pillows in the dryer on high heat for 45 mins. once a week. The heat kills dust mites. Every 6 wks., wash any stuffed animals in hot water or stick them in plastic bags and freeze them overnight to kill of the mites.

Animals: Pets contribute a large share of household allergens, including proteins

found in their dander, dead skin flakes, urine and saliva. Cats are actually worse than dogs because their dander is lighter and clings to everything which makes it more likely to enter your body and cause your immune system to "attack" it. The hardwood flooring, keeping pets off upholstered furniture, and investing in a HEPA air filter, will reduce dander in the air.

Mold: The best way to reduce mold in your house is to keep the temperature around 68° and the relative humidity about 35%. You can pick up a humidity gauge to monitor this. Mold tends to grow in potting soil, especially if it's too moist, keep all indoor plants on the dry side and ban plants from the bedroom, where you spend up to a 1/3 of your time. Place a dehumidifier in damp basements or crawl spaces during summer, which can improve overall air quality throughout the entire house.

Airborne Chemicals: Switch to natural cleaning products; avoiding synthetic fragrances in scented candles, detergents, and deodorants; and if you smoke or live with smokers, now's good time for everybody to quit!

### Allergy Trigger #4: Antibiotics

Antibiotics are successful in fighting bacteria but they also wreak havoc on the

good bacteria that live in your intestines. "Because 70% of your immune system is stimulated by the good bacteria, there's a good chance taking antibiotics will result in an imbalanced immune system. To counter this loss of healthy flora, taking probiotics daily (a brand with shelf-stable lactobacillus) while you're on antibiotics and for a least three months after you finish your prescription. A study published in *Clinical and Experimental Allergy* found that people with grass pollen allergies who took probiotics experienced fewer allergy symptoms than those who didn't. It is also helpful for overall gut health, especially if you're middle-aged or older.

### Allergy Trigger # 5: The great outdoors

Pollutants acts as a chronic irritant to mucous membranes in the nasal passages, and the body has to work hard to eliminate them. To deal with these outdoor irritants, reach for your nasal rinse. While you can't really stay indoors all the time, you can get a little savvy about when to venture out. Most plants pollinate in the morning, which is why pollen counts are higher during the first part of the day. So save outdoor activities like gardening, running errands, or exercising for later in the afternoon. Another ideal times to get outdoors is right after a storm. Rain, after all, washes the air and can drop high pollen counts to almost zero.

(con't. page 5 top, col. 1)

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Visit us on the web:  
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(con't. from page 3, col. 8)  
But you can't expect it to rain every day, not even in Portland or Seattle, so the only sure way to get your seasonal allergies under control is to tend to your immune system. Strengthen it with good nutrition and plenty of sleep, but most of all give it a rest. It's not always in a frenzy, there's a good chance it won't care about a nose full of pollen or mold spores. (naturalsolutionsmag.com)  
\* full article in Natural Solutions April 2009 Edition

## Rhubarb

Nicknamed "pie plant", rhubarb is actually a more versatile veggie than that. Studies show that rhubarb has anticancer properties and can even help lower blood pressure. One serving (1/2 cup diced) contains a mere 15 calories, 1 gram of dietary fiber, 1 gram of protein, and plenty of calcium and vitamins A & C. To combat tartness, add agave, honey or fruit juice!



## Spring 2009 Issue 2

### April 2009 Legacy Corps

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#### Note from the Editor

'Tis the season...for allergies. Unfortunately, for some, allergy season is any season.

I recall my Dad driving me to the doctor's office once every two weeks, letting me out of the car and I'd march in to get my two injections, one in each arm. I'd march back out to the car, my Dad would say, "there's my brave, little girl" and we would repeat it again in a couple weeks. My mother really felt if she has access to a plastic bubble, she'd put me in one.

By the age of eight, I had experienced my first asthma attack and all through nursing school my instructors keep sending me to the Shongum Chest Clinic (NJ) to make sure I didn't have tuberculosis. I didn't, it was just that croupy sounding cough that never seemed to go away.

So...when I saw this article in "Natural Solutions" April 2009 edition, I thought that it may be helpful to some of my fellow allergy sufferers and also

offer some extra help to the caregivers that find that they are experiencing symptoms they never really suffered from before. Your body may be reacting to the extra stress you are under and didn't even realize. Some of those foods and allergens that were questionable before may be a problem for you now.

I hope that you are able to draw some ideas and helpful suggestions from this article.

Ah...Gesundheit!

*Kit*



The most precious gift we can offer others is our presence. When mindfulness embraces those we love, they will bloom like flowers. ~Thich Nhat Hanh

#### Exercising Your Brain

Use your five senses to improve your memory  
Both people with memory problems and those with no memory problems can benefit from stimulating their senses with exercises like these:

- Put spice like cloves, cinnamon, or vanilla extract in a cup covered with foil punched with holes, and guess what the smell is.
- Hold an aroma under your nose and see what memory or association comes to mind. Smell is the most powerful way to bring back memories.
- Try a food that is new to you. New tastes also simulate the brain.
- Put a bunch of different coins in a cup. Without looking, pick up one at a time and try to guess which one you're holding. To stimulate your brain even more, use your left hand if you're right-handed, and vice versa.
- Draw or paint something, just for fun. Art activated the nonverbal and emotional parts of our brain.
- Combine two senses: Listen to music and smell flowers or some other pleasant scent. Listen to the rain and tap your fingers.

Source: The Alzheimer's Association

"The best six doctors anywhere, and no one can deny it, are sunshine, water, rest, and air, exercise and diet. These six will gladly you attend... if only you are willing. Your mind they'll ease Your will they'll mend And charge you not a shilling."

~Nursery rhyme quoted by Wayne Fields, *What the River Know*, 1990



#### Up and Coming!

On April 30th, Helen Tari from the O'Connor Hospital Occupational Therapy Department will be coming to teach us some ways to make our environments safe for the care recipients as well as for ourselves, the caregivers. Training will be held at the Public Safety Building (PSB) from 10:00-noon in room A.

The Legacy Corps has a team walking in the Alzheimer's Assoc. Annual Memory Walk on May 2 at the Soccer Hall of Fame. Join us at

<http://leatherstocking.kintera.org>. If you'd like to make a donation towards the walk or sponsor a walker, please contact Kit or Melody Monfort at the Office of the Aging 607.746.6333.

May 28-There will be a Vol. Training Mtg. from 10:00-noon with subject to be announced.

June 25- There will be a recertification class for CPR and AED trained individuals. If you've been trained more than 2 yrs. ago you may still be eligible to take the class. Call Kit for details.

#### Did you know?

**Music tunes up the brain?** Concetta Tomaino, DA is the executive director of the Institute for Music and Neurologic Function, Beth Abraham Family of Health Services in New York City.

#### Why teach singing to stroke survivors?

People who have had a stroke on the left side of the brain might have expressive aphasia. They can understand speech, but they can't answer with anything more than "OK" or by echoing a few words they've just heard. However, they can often sing complete lyrics to songs. I found that if I got my patients to sing a lot, they were sometimes able to retrieve words, and if I sang with them every day, sometimes they got their speech back. If you show objects on a table to people with aphasia, 9 times out of 10 they can't name them, but if they sing first, 9 times out of 10 they can. I've seen it over and over, but now we are in the midst of a huge study to prove it rigorously. ~Consumer Report on Health