

**Queen Anne Naturopathic Center**  
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## **Spring is here... and so are allergies!**

**Bill Caradonna, R.Ph., N.D.**

Most people look forward to spring, unless you have allergies! Actually, some environmental allergies are quite prominent in summer and fall as well, making every season but winter problematic. If you begin to experience symptoms in early spring, chances are you're reacting to tree pollens. If you acquire a sneezing habit during the summer months, you're probably allergic to grass and weed pollens. If hay fever attacks begin in mid-March and last through late November, you're probably allergic to airborne fungus particles. The symptoms are the same – sneezing, itchy and watery eyes, runny nose, nasal congestion, and irritated throat.

Allergies are one of the most common medical ailments. In the United States, as many as one-third of adults, and up to 40% of children may have them. Commonly (and incorrectly) known as hay fever, seasonal allergic rhinitis occurs from exposure to pollens that are normally harmless substances. But when your body becomes hypersensitive to certain inhaled pollens, you are likely to have reactions along the mucus membranes of your upper respiratory tract, triggered by the release of histamine.

Since allergic symptoms are so common, people don't realize the dramatic impact it can have on daily functioning. A disrupted sleep pattern, fatigue, reduced ability to concentrate, and decreased verbal learning, decision-making speed, and psychomotor speed is seen in those who suffer from allergies. The end result is either frequent absenteeism or substantial decreases in productivity at work. Nasal allergies lead to as many as 3.8 million missed work and school days each year.

Types of non-seasonal allergic triggers include foods, insect bites or stings, dust, molds, pet dander, dust mites, and cockroach droppings (yeew!). Occupational rhinitis can come from increased exposure to certain chemicals, animals, flour, or latex, among other things. Symptoms can be made worse from air pollution and second hand smoke. In severe sensitivities, allergies can cause life threatening (anaphylactic) reactions, requiring immediate medical attention. Asthma and eczema are common diseases that have their roots in allergic responses.

The types of pollen that most frequently cause allergic reactions are produced by the plain-looking plants (trees, grasses, and weeds) that do not have showy flowers. These plants manufacture small, light, dry pollen granules that are custom-made for wind transport. Samples of ragweed pollen have been collected 400 miles out at sea and 2 miles high in the air.

### *Western medicine treatments*

Your eyes are itching like crazy. You want to rub them, but you know that if you do, they will just itch more. But you can't stand the itch, so you... aaauuggghhh! You think you should buy stock in a tissue company, with all the sneezing and nose blowing you are doing. You would like to stop and smell the flowers, but you can't breathe through your nose. So what can you do?

Most likely, you take non-prescription and prescription anti-histamines and decongestants, augmented by steroid nose sprays if symptoms are significant. But these only treat the symptoms, not the cause. Most of these products have side effects and there can be problems with overuse and drug interactions. While some newer drugs offer some reductions in side effects, such as non-drowsy antihistamines, they are considerably more expensive. A few products stop the allergic cascade from starting (leukotriene inhibitors, inhaled cromolyn, etc.) but they have to be taken routinely before your particular allergy triggers appear. Allergists do offer desensitization shots, a lengthy process.

## *Naturopathic treatments*

The Naturopathic treatment goal is to balance your body so that your hypersensitivity to these allergic triggers is reduced or eliminated. The immune system over-reactivity that causes these symptoms are often influenced by the state of your adrenal glands, your nutritional levels, and the efficiency of your lymphatic system. Also, chronic food allergies often keep your immune system on hyper-alert, so dietary changes can be very helpful.

Your adrenal glands produce natural steroid hormones. Some of these have anti-inflammatory activities. Our adrenals become less efficient due to stress, insufficient sleep levels, and use of artificial stimulants such as caffeine. High refined sugar and carbohydrate intake can ultimately stress the adrenal glands as well. Changes in diet and lifestyle, as well as nutritional and herbal products may be prescribed to support your adrenal gland function. Often, when adrenal gland function has been improved, people naturally reduce their caffeine and refined sugar intake because they don't need to attempt to artificially stimulate their energy throughout the day.

In the late 1950s, researchers determined that the action of licorice is comparable to cortisone in that it stimulates the adrenals, inhibits inflammation, and relieves symptoms of allergy, but without the harmful effects from commonly prescribed steroids. Another mechanism of licorice is to increase the half-life of cortisol (a hormone secreted by the adrenal glands), thereby increasing its anti-inflammatory action. Therapeutic use of licorice extracts needs to be monitored professionally.

Your lymphatic system is involved in bringing immune system "defenders" to the "invaded" area (your mucus membranes), and then draining away the "battlefield" debris. If these avenues are clogged, your body becomes inefficient in these activities, creating more congestion. Dairy products (milk, cheese, etc.) are the most common foods known to aggravate this situation. The presence of other food allergies contributes to the inefficiency of the lymphatic system. Other frequent offenders include eggs, nuts, fish, shellfish, and wheat. Several herbal and homeopathic products help thin lymphatic congestion and make it work more efficiently. Also, there are several nutritional products that improve the health of the mucus membranes. These approaches also help chronic sinusitis conditions and chronic earaches.

The presence of enough stomach hydrochloric acid (HCl) and pepsin are crucial for proper digestion and mineral absorption, and may play a direct role in overcoming allergies. Studies have shown that asthma and allergy sufferers tend to have low levels of HCl but show improvement with supplementation. Supplementation of HCl should be supervised by a qualified health care practitioner.

In Naturopathic medicine, every patient is treated individually. A comprehensive plan to address all these potential imbalances is created based upon the individual factors present influencing each person's health status.

In the meantime, symptoms can be successfully controlled without side effects using various homeopathic nose sprays, tablets, and eye drops, as well as several nutritional supports and herbal products. These can act as natural anti-histamines, break up immune complexes that trigger reactions, and help reduce symptoms without risk of overuse or drug interactions.

**About the Author** – Bill Caradonna, R.Ph., N.D. is a registered Pharmacist and Licensed Naturopathic physician. He is a graduate of Bastyr University where he also was a faculty member. He has been in the natural medicine field for over 20 years, and is in private practice at the Queen Anne Naturopathic Center in Seattle, WA. More information can be found at [www.QANC.com](http://www.QANC.com)