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If spring brings a rebirth of your allergy symptoms, try these natural remedies to find relief.

The sneezin' season

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ou waited eagerly for spring to arrive, with its warm breezes and budding trees. Now it's here, and there's a big problem: You can't set foot outside without getting all stuffed up, sneezing constantly or wanting to rip out your eyes. And if allergy-inducing pollen gets into your house or you have lots of dust, mold or pet dander, you may not feel any better indoors.

Yes, allergy season is here again, and it's back with a vengeance. According to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI), allergic rhinitis (aka hay fever or seasonal allergies) affects between 10 percent and 30 percent of all American adults, and its prevalence is increasing. Thanks to global warming and other factors, the average pollen season is longer and more pollens are being produced, and this may be a part of the reason, says allergist Clifford Bassett, M.D., assistant clinical professor of medicine at New York University School of Medicine and Long Island College Hospital.

Seasonal allergies result when your immune system overreacts to pollens from plants, mainly weeds, grasses and trees. Your body then releases a substance called histamine to fight off the allergens as if they were viruses, causing symptoms like nasal congestion, sinus pressure, sneezing, coughing, a scratchy throat and red, itchy or watery eyes as well as fatigue. If allergies are not adequately treated, Bassett says, sufferers often develop related sinus symptoms, ear infections and/or asthma (see box, pg. 56).

Over-the-counter and prescription meds such as antihistamines, decongestants and corticosteroids (in the form of pills, nasal sprays and eye drops) can provide temporary relief but can also cause unpleasant

side effects such as drowsiness and dry mouth. And immunotherapy (aka allergy shots), while often effective, can be time-consuming and expensive. So before you go to the drugstore or see your doctor, try the following lifestyle changes and natural remedies.

Distance yourself from pollen >>

Minimizing your exposure to pollen is your first and simplest line of defense. Here's how:

CHECK THE COUNT When the pollen level is high, it's best to stay indoors, says allergist Andy Nish, M.D., of the Allergy and Asthma Care Center in Gainesville, Ga. Learn the pollen count by checking your local TV weather report or newspaper. Or go to Pollen.com and type in your ZIP code for a four-day forecast. Bonus: You can sign up for allergy alert emails or download a smartphone app that will notify you when the pollen count is on the rise.

WATCH THE WEATHER AND THE CLOCK "Pollen levels are typically higher on sunny, dry and windy days and lower on cooler, moist and windless days," Bassett says. Many grasses and other plants pollinate early in the day, making mornings (particularly between 5 a.m. and 10 a.m.) notoriously problematic for allergy sufferers. So wait until the late afternoon or early evening to take your dog for a long walk or weed your flower bed.

WORK OUT INDOORS Exercise can often help alleviate nasal congestion so you can breathe better—unless you're outside sucking in pollen, says Bassett. Whenever possible, stick to indoor workouts, especially when the pollen count outdoors is moderate to high.

FLUSH OUT THE POLLEN Research shows that using a neti pot to rinse allergens out of your nasal passages can ease congestion and sinus



Check the weather and pollen forecasts before you head out.

Fluffy might need a trim for your sake.

pressure. Elana Gelman, N.D., a naturopathic doctor at the University of Bridgeport Naturopathic Medicine Clinic in Connecticut, recommends filling the device with 8 ounces of warm purified (distilled or deionized) water mixed with 1/4 teaspoon salt. Or buy a neti pot that comes with premixed saline. (Never use tap water; doing so was recently associated with a few fatal brain infections in Louisiana.) For best results, use it in the morning and again just before bed, Gelman suggests.

WASH IT AWAY To keep pollen out of your house (and especially your bedroom), ditch your shoes and change into clean duds at the door. Put dirty clothes in a laundry bag or hamper with a lid, then wash them in hot water and toss in the dryer (never hang them to dry outdoors!). Rinse your hair nightly before bed so your pillowcase doesn't get covered with pollen, Bassett advises.

PROTECT YOUR PEEPERS Sunglasses (particularly wrap-arounds) can help keep pollen out of your eyes.

KEEP WINDOWS AND DOORS CLOSED Use air conditioning in your home and car to keep cool, no matter how much you crave fresh air. And, Bassett says, "Don't forget to change or clean your home A/C filters on a regular basis to assist you indoors."

CLEAN LIKE MAD Wash your bed linens in hot water at least once a week and vacuum carpets and drapes even more often. (A vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter is best.) This will help to remove pollen and indoor allergens that could ratchet up your suffering, says Bassett.

VET YOUR PETS "Outdoor allergens can be carried inside by furry pets," Nish says. Trimming their fur could help reduce the amount that ends up indoors. Or, wash off your pet before letting him in and restrict him to one area of the house, Nish suggests. >>



Tame your immune reactions ➤

At the same time that you try to keep pollens at bay, these techniques can help tamp down your immune system's response to them:

ALLERGY-PROOF YOUR DIET Up to a third of hay fever sufferers experience a worsening of symptoms after eating certain foods, Bassett says. Known as food-pollen or oral allergy syndrome, it occurs when the body mistakes the proteins in some raw fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, seeds and herbs for the proteins in pollen.

Because you never know how you'll respond, anyone who is allergic to tree pollen, such as birch or oak, should be wary of certain fruits (apples, peaches, pears, kiwi, plums, nectarines); vegetables (carrots, celery, fennel, green peppers); nuts (hazelnuts, almonds, walnuts); and herbs and spices (coriander, basil and paprika). Grass and weed pollen sufferers may want to avoid melons and bananas; cucumbers; certain herbs and spices (echinacea, chamomile, parsley, paprika, oregano, dill, coriander, tarragon, pepper); as well as caraway and sunflower seeds.

To further sidestep symptoms, avoid eating any food that gives you an itchy or tingly mouth or an upset stomach during allergy season. Or, try cooking it—it's only when these foods are raw that they typically cause trouble, according to the AAAAI.

GIVE ACUPUNCTURE A SHOT Acupuncture can help alleviate hay fever by calming the immune system and decreasing inflammation. A study published in the *American Journal*



Stay away from certain stone fruits if you have tree pollen allergies.

of Chinese Medicine found that it reduced symptoms in all the allergy sufferers studied, with no major side effects.

TRY HOMEOPATHY Choosing the right remedy depends on your specific symptoms, says Christopher Johnson, N.D., founder of Thrive Naturopathic in Alexandria, Va. *Allium cepa* can be effective if you have lots of burning nasal discharge, frequent sneezing when outside, and red, burning and watery eyes. Use *Euphrasia* for bland nasal discharge, burning tears, extremely watery, itchy or swollen eyes, and a daytime cough that improves at night. *Sabadilla* is for those with intense sneezing, a very runny nose and red eyes. You can buy each remedy separately (\$4 for 170 pellets; rxhomeo.com) or get *Sabadil*, a mixture of all three (\$11 for 60 tablets; amazon.com). Follow package directions to determine dosage. If you're unsure which remedy to try, consult a homeopath or a naturopathic physician, Johnson says.

FEEL THE PRESSURE Like acupuncture, NAET (Nambudripad Allergy Elimination Technique) aims to rebalance your body's immune system—only without needles. The acupressure treatment takes five to 10 minutes, says Suzann Wang, N.D., a naturopathic doctor at Natural Health California in Palo Alto. Afterward, you sit holding a glass vial containing the offending allergen for about 20 minutes and then are instructed to avoid breathing it in (by staying indoors or wearing a mask) for 25 hours. About half of Wang's patients report that they no longer suffer allergy symptoms after just one treatment, while it takes several visits for others, she says.

The asthma-allergy connection

An estimated 20 million Americans have asthma, chronically inflamed airways that swell and make breathing difficult. And for at least 65 percent of them, inhaled allergens (such as pollen) can trigger the attacks, says New York City allergist Clifford Bassett, M.D. If you have asthma, getting your seasonal allergies under control should help you. If you don't, doing so could prevent you from developing asthma in the first place.

Soothe symptoms with supplements ➤

These herbs and other natural remedies can have an anti-allergic effect; try using them during allergy season in conjunction with the other techniques described previously. **QUERCETIN**, a bioflavonoid found in onion and garlic, can help prevent the release of symptom-causing histamine, Gelman says. It can be taken in supplement form, possibly along with bromelain, an anti-inflammatory enzyme found in pineapple, for better absorption.

Try: Best Vite Quercetin and Bromelain (\$7 for 120 capsules; bestvite.com) or Rainbow Light Allergy Rescue (\$24 for 60 capsules; rainbowlight.com).

STINGING NETTLE is an herb that, like quercetin, acts as a natural antihistamine and anti-inflammatory. It can be used in tea, tincture or pill form. **Try:** Gaia Herbs Nettle Leaf (\$27 for 60 capsules; gaiaherbs.com).

BUTTERBUR LEAF EXTRACT was found in a recent *British Medical Journal* study to be as effective as a popular antihistamine drug in controlling hay fever symptoms. Take one tablet four times daily. Each tablet should contain about 8 milligrams of the active ingredient Petasin, Gelman notes. **Try:** Enzymatic Therapy Petadolex Butterbur Extract (\$35 for 60 50-milligram softgels; physicianformulas.com).

N-ACETYL CYSTEINE is a powerful antioxidant that can help break up mucus and ease congestion, Gelman says. It's best if taken in conjunction with 1,000 to 2,000 milligrams of vitamin C a day. **Try:** NutraBio NAC (N-Acetyl Cysteine) (\$14 for 150 600-milligram capsules; nutrabio.com). ✕

Stacy Whitman is a health and fitness writer based in Sun Valley, Idaho. A former allergy sufferer who required shots, she is now symptom-free.

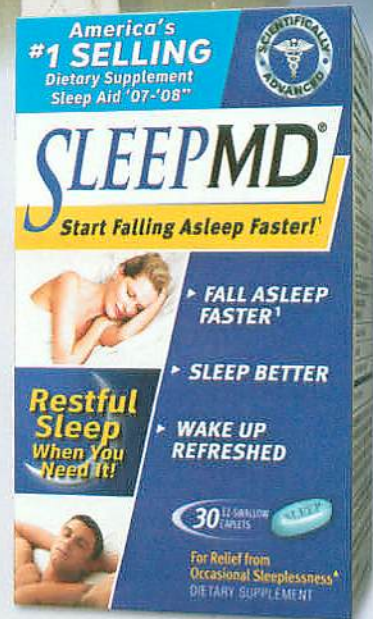


Allergic to grass and weeds? Eating several herbs and spices can trigger symptoms.

NAET balances your immune system so it doesn't overreact to allergens.



Catching Z's Just Got Easier



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¹In a detailed analysis of multiple studies conducted by sleep researchers (where objective testing measures included polysomnography [PSG] and actigraphy), it was found that melatonin, the primary ingredient in Sleep MD[®], significantly advanced sleep onset. Read entire label before use. © 2012