



June 19, 2010 – Rochester, NY

## Seasonal Allergies

The past two springs and summers have been about the worst for seasonal allergies I've experienced, both in Michigan and other parts of the U.S. Starting with tree pollen in spring and continuing with grasses, flowers, and soon to be ragweed season, what to do about allergies is among the top questions you ask me. In this message, I'm going to give you a brief overview of what causes seasonal allergies and then based on that, what you might be able to do about it.

I'm going to preface this by saying that not everything works for everybody—we're all different and we all have different nutritional deficiencies. Another point: I'm not taking about food allergies, such as shellfish or peanut allergies. Those are extremely serious, and this message doesn't deal with that type of allergic response. With that in mind, let's take a look at the cause of seasonal allergies.

### The Allergic Reaction

Seasonal allergies occur when your immune system reacts to plant pollen. It's not that the pollen is a noxious substance such as bee venom; it's a part of nature, but for some reason, pollen triggers an allergic response in up to 20-30% of the population. Your immune system makes chemicals called antibodies that identify the pollen as something harmful, even though it isn't. The immune system then produces proteins known as IgE antibodies. These antibodies protect you from the pollen and trigger the release of histamines. If you have allergies, you're familiar with the results: runny nose, watery eyes, sneezing, sinuses that fill with fluid causing headaches, constant post-nasal drip. In kids especially, dark shadows appear under the eyes, sometimes called "the allergic shiner." The net effect is that you're miserable.

The question is why this happens. There are several theories related to nutrition. First, we may lack probiotics in our digestive system; we don't eat as many fruits and vegetables as we need, and some people are lactose intolerant. The probiotics not only help us digest and absorb food, they also help the immune system and that includes the allergic response.

Second, we take in fats and oils that contribute to making the hormones that support the immune response, and we don't take in foods that suppress it. Saturated fats and omega-6 fatty acids from vegetable oils support it, while omega-3 fatty acids suppress it.

Third, antioxidants and phytonutrients are also lacking in our diet because we don't eat enough fruits and vegetables. Vitamins C and E as well as phytonutrients such as quercetin all seem to be important for the immune response to function normally.

### Nutritional Approaches for Seasonal Allergies

As I said earlier, not everything will work for everyone when it comes to seasonal allergies, but these have the best support in the research.

#### **Reduce Saturated and Omega-6 Fatty Acid Intake**

Saturated fats are found in animal products such as beef, pork, and chicken as well as tropical oils such as palm oil. Omega-6 fatty acids are found in corn, safflower, sunflower, and cottonseed oils; reduce the intake of these types of oils. Eat leaner cuts of meat and use olive oil and canola oil in salad dressings and for cooking.

## Probiotics

Taking a broad-spectrum probiotic every day seems to benefit seasonal allergies. By broad spectrum, I mean one that includes three to eight bacteria with those funny-sounding names like acidophilus and lactobacillus. Use a quality product and take it according to the label directions. Some people wonder whether it's necessary to take them every day. Well, if you ate a perfect diet, you would naturally get them every day, wouldn't you? If you don't eat a perfect diet, you need to take them in supplement form.

## Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Increase your intake of omega-3 fatty acids with more fish and nuts. You can also use a dietary supplement with fish or flaxseed oil. The goal for adults should be three to six grams of omega-3s per day and one or two for children. Between increasing omega-3s and reducing the omega-6s, you're putting your body in a position to reduce the immune response and reduce the inflammation in your body. That will help with many other conditions in your body as well, such as cardiovascular disease.

## Quercetin and Other Phytonutrients

Quercetin is found in onions and apples. Ellagic acid is found in raspberries. Those have the most research behind them when it comes to reducing inflammation in people with allergies. But that doesn't mean that other phytonutrients from blueberries, blackberries, and other plants won't help as well—they just haven't been as well researched. So eat servings of those every day. Back up what you eat by using a product that contains plant concentrates from apples, raspberries, and other fruits and vegetables made from organically grown plants.

## The Bottom Line

If seasonal allergies are making your summer miserable, get control of your nutrition and see if the approaches I've outlined will help. As I said, not everything works for everybody, but think of it this way: if you feel 25% or 50% better, doesn't that improve the quality of your life? You bet it does. As a good friend told me, swing for singles and the home runs will take care of themselves. That's the approach you should use when you use nutrition for help with conditions you may have.

If you try these approaches and nothing works or it's not enough, see your doctor for what your next step should be. It may be as simple as an over-the-counter antihistamine that you use as needed or as complicated as allergy shots based on your response to allergy tests. Paula has been getting shots for most of her life, and she absolutely will tell you they work. They're not medications. The shots stimulate production of the antibodies you need for specific types of pollen without instigating the immune response. Then when your body is exposed to the real deal, it will have weapons ready to attack and defend, and you won't get the typical symptoms or will get them in a much smaller and more manageable magnitude. Many people get shots for a few years and are able to quit—no further symptoms.

It's important to deal with seasonal allergies. If your immune system is at its limit fighting pollen, what chance do you have when another attack occurs such as a cold or flu virus? And childhood allergies left untreated tend to get worse, which can be life-threatening if allergy symptoms tip over into an asthma attack. When it comes to seasonal allergies, there's plenty you can do; the key as always is that you have to do it consistently.

What are you prepared to do today?

**Dr. Chet**

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