

To your health

Springtime allergies

Spring is here and with it the joys of new leaves on the trees and longer daylight hours. However, for some, the warmer months bring the annual misery of seasonal allergies. Sneezing, wheezing, runny noses, itchy and watery eyes are just a few of the common symptoms known as 'Hay fever'. Already affecting nearly one in four people, symptoms are on the rise!

Seasonal "allergic rhinitis" is a hyper-sensitive reaction of the immune system to an airborne trigger such as pollen. Tree pollens are often the culprit in the spring and grasses in the summer. So far, more than 200,000 known plant species are capable of inducing pollen allergies in susceptible individuals! Air temperature, sunlight, rainfall and air pollution affect pollen production by the plant.

It is common for hay fever to suddenly develop after moving to a new country. In southern France, many suffer with new exposure to cypress and mimosa trees, despite not having had allergies prior to living here.

There has been a significant increase in the incidence of seasonal allergies over the last 20 years. It is thought that plants are not only making pollen more abundantly, but also more allergenic. Pollen is the plant's defence mechanism to stressors, so with the constant bombardment of environmental toxins, plants are releasing more pollen in response.

What causes Hay fever?

Pollen is easily absorbed into the blood through the lungs, the skin lining the mouth, nose, eyes and throat, and even the gut. They can trigger a series of reactions whereby protein molecules (called IgE antibodies) are stimulated in the blood. Antibodies travel the bloodstream and combine with a specific type of white blood cell containing histamine.

The combining of the antibody to the white cell causes the histamine to be released, free to produce the common hay fever symptoms. As we've been seeing in these articles, it usually comes down to the gut. 70% or more of the immune system is located in the intestinal lining, so gut health must be supported to have a good immunity against "invaders" such as pollen.

Like the gut, the cells lining the lungs form the first line of defence against insults from the environment. Just as we've seen an increase in 'leaky gut', airborne pollution is making lung tissue more 'leaky' and susceptible to allergens such as pollen.

Common risk factors for allergies:

- ▶ Genetic predisposition
- ▶ Diet
- ▶ Climate
- ▶ Pollutants
- ▶ Poor development of immune recognition
- ▶ Histamine intolerance

Controlling histamine

Anti-histamines are the #1 go-to remedy for allergies, but they are not always well tolerated*. It is worth considering nutrition in the fight against seasonal allergic responses.

The first step in fighting high histamine is to drink plenty of filtered water. Histamine helps regulate hydration levels, so if dehydration is detected, more histamine is released.

Vitamin C is a natural anti-histamine and those with low Vitamin C produce higher levels of histamine. Vitamin C is found in fresh, brightly coloured fruit and vegetables, but over-cooking food destroys it. Stress, smoking, alcohol, and the repetitive use of certain medications can deplete Vitamin C reserves.

Avoid triggers: Some foods are naturally high in histamine. These include shellfish, spinach, red-wine, mature cheeses, strawberries and chocolate. Limiting the quantities of these and avoiding a combination of all the above may reduce the "histamine hit" on the body. Histamine also develops in "left-over foods", so aim to eat fresh and unprocessed foods.

Quercetin is an anti-inflammatory plant molecule and known to help reduce histamine levels. Good sources are onions, garlic, leeks, apples, cranberries, blackcurrants, broccoli, fennel, capers, buckwheat and green tea. Pineapple is a rich source of Bromelain, an enzyme which enhances absorption of quercetin.

Sulphur is another histamine stabilising compound found in garlic, leeks and onions as well as eggs.

Omega 3's are anti-inflammatory and essential. Children can often be depleted. Good sources are oily fish, flax, pumpkin and chia seeds, and walnuts, algae and spirulina.

Anti-inflammatory and anti-histamine foods:

- ▶ Horseradish (helps with congestion and mucous)
- ▶ Ginger (helps soothe inflammation)
- ▶ Turmeric is a natural anti-inflammatory and may reduce histamine levels. Try mixing with marinades, yogurts, soups, curries, and warming teas.
- ▶ Nuts and Seeds (for essential fatty acids)
- ▶ Berries (rich in vitamin C and flavonoids)



Cut down on foods encouraging mucus production such as wheat and dairy.

In addition, certain types of gut bacteria produce histamine and certain types of bacteria degrade it. Imbalance in the gut can therefore be a factor for high histamine.

Histamine producing bacteria are: Lactobacillus reuteri, casei, and bulgaricus, so avoid probiotics with those in it.

Histamine reducing bacteria are: Lactobacillus rhamnosus, L. plantarum and bifidobacteria.

Avoid exposure to pollen:

- ▶ Wear sunglasses outside to prevent pollen getting into your eyes.
- ▶ Keep the car windows closed when driving.
- ▶ Avoid cutting grass, and playing or walking in grassy areas – particularly in the early morning, evening and at night when pollen counts are highest.
- ▶ Avoid drying clothes outside, this helps to prevent pollen coming into the house.
- ▶ Keep windows and doors shut to avoid pollen coming into the house. ▲

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* For educational purposes only, always consult your doctor before starting or changing medication.