



Alt.Health

Easing seasonal sneezes

Tame pollen overload with fish oil and probiotics

By Elizabeth Bromstein

As daffodils wave their petals in the wind, seasonal allergies have folks sneezing, itching and keeling over in exhaustion.

My downstairs neighbour has them something awful. The poor thing has a big, puffy face every morning, and her eyes are practi-cal-ly sealed shut.

Luckily, I'm spared springtime attacks, but come August I join the suffering contingent. Late-summer allergies, specifically caused by rag-weed, are totally different from those in spring caused by all kinds of pollen.

Some argue that cities might be aggravating the problem by planting more pollen-producing male than female trees, leaving the homeless pollen floating through the air with nowhere to land but up your nose.

So how to tame these overzealous immune reactions? Like a lot of people, I can't handle over-the-counter meds. They make me psycho. What else is out there?

What the experts say

"Keep your windows closed; use an air conditioner. Don't dry your clothes outside. We recommend medication – antihistamines for the mildest cases, and for more serious cases intranasal steroids. Some people also need allergy shots. Yes, any medication can cause behavioural changes. Most people complain of somnolence. Increased aggression is less common but possible. On balance, these medications are well tolerated. I don't know of any natural remedies that are effective. Saline nasal washes may help relieve symptoms. People are moving toward litter-free trees, especially in cities. They don't want trees with too many seeds or flowers, but such trees are high pollen producers. Ornamental grasses also generate a lot of pollen."

SUSAN WASERMAN, allergist and associate professor, division of allergy and clinical immunology, McMaster University, Hamilton

"When a person has a family history of allergies, I prescribe a constitutional homeopathic remedy. There may be times when symptoms need an acute remedy like allium cepa. We need to dampen the immune system's hyper-vigilance. One way is to take quercetin. Avoid animal fats, but take fish oils as part of an anti-inflammatory protocol. Probiotics help the flora of the intestines, and digestive enzymes break down food to be better absorbed. Poorly digested food causes unhealthy immune reactions."

ZORANA ROSE, naturopath, Toronto

"A lot of cities are planting new trees, male clones, without taking the al-ler-gy component into account. Some cities, like Las Vegas, have pollen control ordinances, but most don't. Fruitless mulberry trees produce some of the worst allergy-causing pollen. There's a clone called weeping mulberry that is female and produces hardly any. Red maple is male and produces a lot of highly allergenic pollen, as does Lombardy poplar. We need to get cities on board."

THOMAS LEO OGREN *author, Allergy-Free Gardening, San Luis Obispo, California*

“Studies document that smog makes pollen allergy symptoms more severe. Plants that don’t flower or flower less create more allergies because they are wind-pollinated. Wind tunnels and hard surfaces that deflect pollen mean allergies can be just as bad in cities as in rural areas. Some people get very hyperactive and agitated on the newer class of antihistamines, but we have a lot of new, effective treatments. Natural remedies can help with milder allergies, but I don’t prescribe those.”

ROSS CHANG, *president of the BC Society of Allergy and Immunology, Vancouver*

“It’s important to realize that if we didn’t have trees and plants, there would be even more dust in the air than there is now, and that would be just as bad as pollen. Trees are in fact massive air filters taking a lot of pollen and dust out of the air. They also filter nitrous oxide and sulphur dioxide. Some species, called cultivars, don’t really produce flowers or fruit, but there are very, very few of them. If people were to plant only these, we would soon have a monoculture of trees and set ourselves up for disaster.”

RICHARD UBBENS, *director of forestry, Parks Forestry and Recreation, Toronto*

