

# Natural Remedies for Seasonal Allergies

by Dr. Lauri Grossman



For many, spring brings joy via outdoor activities amid blossoming flowers and blooming trees, as they visit parks, hike through meadows and jog along roads in the warming air. For millions of allergy sufferers, however, the attendant airborne pollen brings bedeviling sneezes, congestion, teary eyes and runny noses. Hay fever alone, which affects 35 million Americans, shuts many of us indoors. Before resorting to such an extreme measure, try controlling allergic reactions using some of these simple suggestions.

The Mayo Clinic recommends that we begin by reducing exposure to allergy triggers:

- Stay indoors on dry, windy days and early mornings, when pollen counts are high. The best time to be outside is after a good rain, which helps clear pollen from the air.
- Remove clothes previously worn outside. Immediately after coming inside, shower thoroughly to rinse off pollen.
- Don't hang laundry outside, because

pollen may stick to it, especially sheets and towels.

- Keep indoor air as clean as possible by turning on the air conditioner in both the house and car, and use high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters, especially in the bedroom; most cost less than \$100. Make sure the vacuum cleaner has a HEPA filter, too. Keep indoor air comfortably dry with a dehumidifier.

For those that love being outdoors, several natural remedies can help. Dr. Roger Morrison, a holistic physician in Point Richmond, California, likes targeted, widely available, over-the-counter homeopathic medicines. Carefully read labels to match specific symptoms with those noted on individual remedies.

For example, for a badly dripping nose, *Allium cepa* may be the most helpful remedy. It helps lessen nasal discharge, plus reduce sneezing and congestive headaches that can accompany allergies.

If allergy symptoms center around the eyes, causing itching, burning, redness and tears, then homeopathic *Euphrasia* is a better choice. If night-time post-nasal drainage leads to coughing upon waking, *Euphrasia* can help, as well.

*Pulsatilla* helps people whose allergies are worse when they enter a warm room or feel congested when they lie down at night.

Homeopathic remedies generally are available for less than \$10. If symptoms don't improve in three days, stop and try a different homeopathic remedy.

Homeopathic practitioner Dr. Greg Meyer, in Phoenix, Arizona, says that many of his patients benefit from taking herbs and other natural supplements, and one of the most effective for hay fever is *Urtica dioica* (stinging nettles). Studies reported in *Planta Medica: Journal of Medicinal Plant and Natural Product Research*, showed that after one week, nearly two-thirds of the participants taking two 300 milligram (mg) capsules of freeze-dried nettles experienced decreased sneezing and itching.

Dr. Andrew Weil, of the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine, in Tucson, recommends taking 250 mg of freeze-dried nettles extract every two to four hours until symptoms subside.

Quercetin is another useful herb. By preventing release of histamine, it also works to lessen the sneezing and itching that accompany allergies. Take 400 mg twice a day before meals.

Diana Danna, an integrative nurse practitioner in Staten Island, New York, suggests the age-old remedy of a neti pot to relieve congested nasal passages. It may take a bit of practice, but she's seen how rinsing the sinuses with a warm saltwater solution can reduce congestion and make breathing easier. An over-the-counter squeeze bottle can substitute for a neti pot, as can NeilMed Sinus Rinse. Danna suggests rinsing twice a day for best results.

Simple dietary modifications often yield promising results, as well. Stick to non-mucous-producing foods and eat more foods that give a boost to the body's natural immune system. Whole grains, fruits and vegetables and raw

nuts and seeds fit both categories, as do lean proteins like fresh fish and organic meats. Drinking plenty of clean water flushes the system and thins secretions. Foods that tend to cause the most problems for allergy sufferers include dairy products, fried and processed foods and refined sugars and flours.

Adding essential fatty acids to a diet has benefits beyond allergy relief. In my own practice, I've seen how patients that take one to two tablespoons of flaxseed oil or three grams of fish oil during the spring months breathe more easily when outdoors. They also delight in healthier looking skin, shinier hair and harder nails.

Trying these approaches may well turn spring into a favorite time of year for everyone.

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