

A Combat Plan for Summer Allergies



**DR. HEATHER
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In long winter days we dream of the warmth of spring. For the many seasonal allergy sufferers in Ottawa, those dreams are plagued with visions of itchy watery eyes, pounding headaches, runny noses, and congested sinuses. Imagine enjoying spring and summer, free of allergies; free to enjoy the outdoors without a purse full of antihistamines. No way you say? Oh, but I am. By taking the steps now to have an allergy free year, this dream can become a reality.

MAKING PEACE WITH ALLERGIES

It's not the allergen - tree, weed, grass, pollen, dust, mold, animal dander - that cause these allergic symptoms, it is our body's response to these invaders. The body perceives the allergen as a threat and the immune system cries out - "I'm being attacked! Invasion! Call in the army." The army is the immune system cells which try to eradicate the threat. Mast cells are summoned to release chemicals called histamine. This causes many of the allergic symptoms we experience.

Our body is trying to protect us and doing its job very well. This is what causes us so much suffering. So the question is how do we teach our bodies to make peace rather than war with the environment around us?

ADDRESSING THE CAUSE

Antihistamines shut down histamine producing mast cells. These medications offer relief but they do not address the cause of why we have allergies in the first place and they do not prevent allergies from coming back next year.

To prevent symptoms from arising start now by preparing the immune system to be less reactive by allergy season. This involves making healthy nutrition and lifestyle choices and starting treatments such as Sublingual Immunotherapy.

FOODS AS MEDICINE

Unprocessed, whole foods such as whole grains (brown rice, quinoa), vegetables, fruit, lean proteins (fish and chicken-), nuts, seeds, healthy unrefined oils, like virgin olive oil, all promote a healthy immune system. Limit your intake of dairy which increases mucous production. Avoid processed foods, junk food, refined sugar and flour.

Choose foods rich in Vitamin C, which help to stabilize mast cells. Eat lots of peppers, broccoli, cauliflower, tomatoes, kale and berries. Quercetin is a bioflavonoid that also

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stabilizes mast cells and reduces inflammation. Sources for quercetin are red onions, the white pith of citrus fruits, apples, and lovage. Choose



find nasal lavage your local health food or drug store.

Allergies tell us that our bodies find the environment around us threatening. Sometimes this is also true on an emotional level. Perhaps we find our environment stressful or we live with fear and uncertainty. Stress stimulates the hormone cortisol. Over time, high cortisol levels have a negative impact on our immune system. Ensure that you make self care a priority to minimize the impacts of chronic stress.

SUBLINGUAL IMMUNOTHERAPY

Sublingual immunotherapy is an effective alternative to allergy shots. It treats the cause of allergies by giving small doses of the allergen under the tongue rather than being injected. Exposure to these small doses over time increases our immune system's tolerance to the allergens and reduces the allergenic symptoms.

A conventional skin prick test is performed to determine what allergies are present - grass, trees, ragweed, mould, dust, cats & dogs. Treatment should be started as early as possible - at least 30-60 days before the season to reduce allergy symptoms.

In a world of sneezes, sniffles and watery eyes, I offer you hope for an allergy free year. There is a way to reduce symptoms, address the cause and even prevent future allergy outbreaks. Sleep better with more pleasant dreams. 🌿

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organic foods as much as possible as pesticides will exacerbate your allergies. Half your plate at each meal should be delicious rich veggies.

Omega-3 fatty acids are healthy fats that help to stabilize the membranes of mast cells over time and help to lessen the symptoms of allergies. Good sources for fatty acids are: salmon, flaxseeds and walnuts. For a therapeutic dose, consider supplementing with fish oils or flaxseed oil. Quality is important when choosing supplementation.

Rest and regular exercise are essential for a healthy immune system and our overall wellness. Ensure you are sleeping well throughout the night allowing your body to rejuvenate and repair itself.

Some herbs have natural antihistamine effects including chamomile and nettle tea. To extract the healing constituents, steep a tablespoon or more of the herb for at least 1-2 hours (or overnight) and drink 1-3 times daily. Adding 1-2 teaspoons of local unpasteurized honey throughout the year can help to prevent pollen allergies. I like to add honey and almond milk to my nettle tea.

Nasal lavage involves cleansing the nasal passages with a saline solution. This helps eliminate dust, pollen, other environmental irritants, and reduces excess mucous. You can



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