



Daniel I Newman, M.D., N.D., M.S.O.M.

8301 NE Hazel Dell Ave.
P.O.B. 65759
Vancouver, WA 98665

TEL 360-696-3800
FAX 360-696-0906
www.rising-health.com

The Nose Knows: **Natural Medicine Strategies for Coping with Allergic Rhinitis**

We all know the hallmarks of hay fever, otherwise known as allergic rhinitis: excessive mucus production, congestion, and sneezing. In susceptible people, excessive upper respiratory mucus may even result in a secondary sinus infection (sinusitis).

If the allergic symptoms are in reaction to substances that are only present at certain times of the year (such as specific pollens), the problem is termed *seasonal allergic rhinitis*; if the nose is reacting to materials that are there year round (such as dust, animal pets, and some molds), the problem is called *perennial rhinitis*. Either way, there are several strategies that may be used to lick this problem.

First, **avoidance**, when possible, is always the primary strategy. Nevertheless, that is not always possible: if you are allergic to trees, you are not going to be able to cut down all the trees in the county to satisfy your nose.

Second, you can **block** the allergic response. This approach includes pharmaceuticals like antihistamines, which oppose the effects of histamine on the body (one of the major chemical mediators of the allergic response), or nasally inhaled corticosteroids, which thwart allergic manifestations in the nose.

Third, you can induce **tolerance**, which coaxes the immune system to be less reactive to the offending substances. Immunotherapy (allergy shots) is an example of this approach.

I. Avoidance

Though this may seem self-evident, there are nuances that are worth mentioning. First, if you are allergic to a pet that you cannot bear to part with, limit your exposure to their dander. (Dander, by the way, is not the hair of the animal, but microscopic flakes of shed skin). One way to do this is to keep the animal out of the bedroom, or at least off the bed.

Bathing (or, if they will tolerate it, vacuuming) your animal frequently can help as well. An air purifier in your bedroom is also useful for allergies to trees that may be outside the bedroom window: keep the window shut and run the air purifier in the room.

If you are going to be exposed to plants you know you are reactive to (such as when mowing the lawn) wear a mask. You might also consider a mask if you are going for a bicycle or car ride in the country during allergy season (just remember to remove the mask before entering a bank)!

Dust can be avoided not only by cleaning your home frequently (wearing your mask), but by avoiding ‘dust collectors’ in the home: books, knick knacks, and other irregular surfaces. Keep collections in cases or cabinets behind doors or glass windows to limit their tendency to get dusty.

Mold allergy, particularly relevant in the Northwest, is best addressed by the seek and destroy method: if you suspect a mold problem in your home, or have had water damage, get an expert in non-toxic mold removal techniques to evaluate your home. Some molds, such as *Stachybotrys*, can be highly toxic, and cause very serious disease.

Superficial mold and mildew may be removed by mixing a few drops of **essential oil** (such as tea tree, orange, eucalyptus, or cedar) in a spray bottle of water, and scrubbing the effected surface.

II. Blocking the Allergic Response

There are a number of complementary medicine alternatives to blocking the allergic response. One is **quercetin**, a natural bioflavonoid found in high concentration in yellow onion skins. Aside from being a potent antioxidant, quercetin is a mast cell stabilizer (mast cells are the cells that store and release most of the histamine in the body). It acts fairly quickly, generally within a couple of days. The usual adult dosage is **500mg – 1000mg twice daily**. Some people respond better to the activated form of quercetin, **quercetin chalcone**, which is available either orally or as a nasal spray.

Another useful herb is **stinging nettles** (*Urtica spp.*). Nettles have been shown in studies to improve the symptoms of allergic rhinitis in about 60% of effected patients, at a dosage of **500-1000mg of dried herb twice daily**. However, unlike quercetin, nettles must be started at least 4-6 weeks prior to the expected onset of symptoms to be largely effective.

Bromelain, a series of proteolytic (digestive) enzymes derived from pineapple, has a wonderful anti-inflammatory effect for a number of conditions, including allergic rhinitis. It is also mucolytic, meaning it thins phlegm so it is easier to expel. The potency of Bromelain is measured in GDU (gastric digestive units), and the dosage for allergic rhinitis is **1200-4800 GDU 2-4 times daily between meals**. Too high a dosage may cause gastrointestinal upset.

An Ayurvedic herb called *Ammi visnaga*, or Khella, is also an effective mast cell stabilizer. One of the primary active ingredients in the herb, sodium chromoglycate, has been isolated and is commercially available in an over the counter nasal spray called **Nasal Crom**. The dosage is **1-2 squirts in each nostril 4 times daily**. Unfortunately, like the nettles, it takes about a month to work fully.

Recent studies suggest that over 95% of patients with chronic sinusitis have fungi growing in the sinuses. A nasal spray containing xylitol (a natural sugar) called **Xlear**, used at a dosage of **one squirt in each nostril 4 times daily**, can be helpful in not only ameliorating allergic rhinitis symptoms, but in abating chronic sinus infections as well.

Combination homeopathic remedies, comprised of diluted and specially prepared antigens, are available for the common allergenic groups of grasses, trees, dust, molds, and animals. Unlike injectable antigens, these preparations do not generally induce long term tolerance, but they can give effective temporary relief, usually at a dosage of **10-15 drops** in water **3 times daily**. Professional Formulations makes a good line of these.

Adequate doses of **Vitamin C**, generally at dosages above **1500mg daily** (or at ‘bowel tolerance,’ the dosage just below the threshold of loose stool) can be a helpful adjunct, though it is rarely sufficient to control allergic rhinitis symptoms by itself.

Acupuncture can give rapid and dramatic relief to the symptoms of allergic rhinitis, though it generally takes a series of **8 – 12 treatments** over as many weeks for the response to be sustained.

Chinese herbal formulas can also provide excellent symptomatic improvement for allergic rhinitis, though it usually takes at least a few days and as long as several weeks for an adequate response to be obtained.

III. Tolerance

Besides immunotherapy injections, **acupuncture** and **Chinese herbal formulas** can produce tolerance if a course of treatment is sustained (generally for at least 3 - 6 months). Treatment must focus on the underlying energetic pattern, rather than simply symptomatic treatment. **Constitutional homeopathy**, which is the prescribing of a single homeopathic remedy based upon an individual’s total physical and emotional symptom complex, can induce long term tolerance, as well.

One aspect of curing allergic rhinitis that I have found to be very useful is to identify and treat any underlying **digestive disturbances**. This includes food allergies, stomach, gall bladder, or pancreatic dysfunction, intestinal inflammation, or microorganism imbalance (dysbiosis). From a Chinese medicine perspective, the digestive tract and the nose are intimately connected (both are part of the *Tai Yin – Yang Ming* energetic axis), and disease in the nose frequently implies an imbalance in the gut.

Therefore, identifying and eliminating food intolerances, augmenting digestion, healing gut inflammation, and correcting intestinal flora imbalances can make a big difference in an individual’s tolerance to inhaled antigens.

Hopefully, some of these suggestions will help you next spring to be able to smell the roses!