What is Allergy?

Allergic response is the process of an antigenic substance, usually a protein or polysaccharide, stimulating the immune system to produce antibodies that bind to it and that once the antigen and antibody have bound together cause a cascade of reactions that result in allergy symptoms. These include the release of histamine from mast cells and the production of the pro-inflammatory compounds cytokines, interleukins, leukotrienes, and prostaglandins.

Allergy is strongly predisposed by genetics, but the expression of the genetic predisposition can be influenced by controlling your environmental factors (exposure to allergens, diet, exercise, stress management, etc.).

IgE Allergy

Most people associate allergies with hay fever that manifests as itchy and watery eyes, lung and nasal congestion, and chronic sinus problems or reactions to foods that include hives and throat itching and swelling. These are the immediate type (IgE-mediated) allergic reactions. These reactions can be chronic and debilitating or immediate and life-threatening (anaphylactic).

IgE reactions take place within moments of exposure and therefore the causative allergen is in most cases known. This type of allergy tests reliably with skin testing in most cases.

IgG Allergy

The delayed (IgG-mediated) reactions are more insidious. Typical delayed allergic reactions are fatigue, joint and muscle stiffness and pain, headaches, feeling foggy-headed, anxiety, poor sleep, waking up tired in the morning, and weight gain.

In fact, weight gain is so common with delayed allergic reactions that anyone who has trouble losing weight despite eating less, and who has increased their intake of whole foods and is exercising more, should be tested for food allergies.

For practical purposes, the most common allergies are associated with the following foods in (roughly) their order of frequency:

- Milk and milk products, including cheese (butter is usually okay)
• Wheat and other grains (sprouted grains may be tolerated)
• Citrus foods (oranges, grapefruit, lemon, lime)
• Nightshade-related foods (tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, eggplant)
• Yeast and molds (cultured foods like cheese, breads, yogurt, etc.)
• Soy and soy products

You can often determine which foods give you trouble by avoiding all of them for a couple of weeks and then introducing them one at a time to see how you react. Keep a journal to track symptoms. Introduce only one type of food every two to three days, because it may take that long for the related symptoms to appear.

**Allergy Control Strategies**

There is no absolute cure for allergies, but there are strategies for effective and long-term management. These strategies revolve around avoidance, desensitization, and getting healthier overall for improved immune function and control of inflammation.

**Avoidance**

This strategy lowers your exposure to allergens and decreases the overall stress on your system to adapt.

**Clean up the home**

Get rid of carpeting if you can. If you have ever pulled up carpeting you were probably shocked at the amount of dirt and debris underneath, even if the carpet was cleaned regularly and seemed clean. Replacing carpeting with wood, bamboo, cork, linoleum, or tile significantly decreases your exposure to dust and danders.

**Neti pot**

Washing your sinuses with a neti pot\(^1\) get the dusts, pollens, and mold spores out of your sinuses. The results can be dramatic. Much of the fatigue and foggy-headedness that people with allergies suffer comes from allergens in the sinuses.

\(^1\) a small pot, looking something like an Aladdin’s lamp, that is available from The Elements of Health or from Himalayan Institute (it’s my favorite design for the neti pot).
For acute symptoms, you can use the neti pot twice a day to wash out your sinuses. For long term maintenance, you can use the neti pot twice a week to daily depending on what you find works best for you over time.

The solution for the neti pot is best made at home: 12 oz of water in a jar with a lid, 1tsp of Celtic salt, and 1-2 drops of tea tree oil (antibacterial and antifungal).

Air purifiers

HEPA rated air filter pull the particulates, like dust and pollen, out of the air. Running a HEPA filter in your bedroom at night gives you many hours without the stress of being exposed to allergens.

Eliminate trigger foods

Determine your food allergies and avoid them. You can use a food log to track how you feel in relation to what you eat, you can look for an increase in your pulse after meals to track down food allergies, you can use blood tests (must test for IgG reactions to be useful, or applied kinesiology (AK,muscle testing; ~90% correlation with blood tests). Skin testing for food allergens is not accurate.

Desensitization

This can be a useful strategy for management of chronic allergies. Small doses of the allergen are given consistently over time to decrease the allergic response. Sounds strange, but it does work.

Shots

Seeing an allergist for allergy shots can be useful and I have seen it make dramatic improvement in some people. I usually hold it for a last resort because it takes a long time, is inconvenient (you have to go to the allergist’s office weekly for shots), and expensive.

Homeopathy

This approach for desensitization usually has the advantage over shots in that it is very inexpensive, convenient, and typically works within days.
Bee Pollen

This approach helps me a lot. To work, you have to use local bee pollen. Start with a few grains and work up to a teaspoon or two. Chew it thoroughly and work up slowly.

Getting Healthier

This approach improves your immune function to allow your body to respond normally to the allergens that it’s exposed to in the environment.

Improve digestion

Poor digestion leads to incomplete breakdown of your foods, especially proteins, and increases the antigen load on your system. Many food allergies are of this type and will clear up over time as digestion improves.

Balance intestinal tract

Most of the immune system in your body resides in the intestinal tract. Poor digestion and imbalances of intestinal flora cause chronic inflammation in the intestines that disrupts normal immune response and can lead to allergies. This is true for both food allergies and hay fever.

Restoring optimal intestinal flora through using cultured foods (yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, borsht, kim chee, pickles, olives, and whole grain sourdough breads) and probiotics helps restore immune response and controls allergies.

Optimize liver function

Your liver plays an important role in immune response through its’ supportive roles of balancing blood sugar, controlling protein metabolism, detoxifying metabolic wastes and environmental agents (toxic metals, pesticides, solvents, etc.), and regulating hormones.

Restore adrenal function

Your adrenal glands, located right above your kidneys, play a critical role in regulating your immune response and controlling inflammation. This is a key aspect of controlling allergies for most people. This is the reason that a cortisone shot during allergy season can make such a huge difference in allergy symptoms. Unfortunately, the side effects of this approach can undermine your overall health; it is better to restore adrenal function naturally.

Balance body pH

Your body pH controls function of enzymes and cellular functions throughout your body. Most people have an overall acidic pH from eating too much refined foods and this predisposes to
allergies and inflammation. Using pH paper\(^3\) to measure your body pH can guide you to key changes in your diet that lead to better health, overall, and control of allergies, in particular. For many, apple cider vinegar is very useful for balancing body pH in addition to changes in diet (usually more fruits and vegetables).

**Hydration and electrolytes**

Most people who have allergies are chronically dehydrated; they don’t drink enough water and it is a large part of the cause of their allergies! I know that sounds too basic or simple to be important, but it is essential. You must be well hydrated and you must have natural, unrefined salt (Celtic salt) in your diet.

**Detoxification and fasting**

This has really helped me over the years. When all else fails, I have found that a short juice fast of 3-4 days will really help decrease my allergies. Sometimes it may take two or three of these fasts to do the trick, but the effort and discipline is worth it to be free of debilitating hay fever.

In a similar way, drinking freshly made vegetable juice is very helpful and improves your health, overall, in some wonderful ways. It’s very effective for improving liver function and optimizing body pH for most people. Detoxification and fasting will be covered more deeply in another article.