



ARREST YOUR ALLERGIES

**Relief for food and pollen allergies
may be closer than you think.**

BY THERESA WASHBURN
Photo by Megan McCluskey, Atypik Studio

Sneezing, watery eyes, hives, gastrointestinal issues, itching mouth and eczema are all signs you may be one of the unfortunate sufferers of allergies. While genetics may contribute to the likelihood that you will acquire allergic reactions to food or pollen, other environmental factors can be instrumental in this immune-related condition. “There is new work that is looking at the relationship of the lack of vitamin D to allergies,” says Dr. Mary Morris of Allergy Associates. “In addition to environment and genetics, the types of bacteria present in the intestinal tract has changed. With 30 percent of the immune system located in the GI tract, keeping beneficial bacteria in that part of your body is something we promote.”

Know your body

Allergy or food diaries can help people identify seemingly unrelated symptoms including headaches, fatigue and abdominal bloating. Dr. Morris suggests noting food reactions even if the allergy is airborne. Some people have a tendency for synergistic or cross reactions; for instance, those allergic to birch pollen may also react to apples, carrots and hazelnuts because of shared proteins in their genetic makeup. In these cases, when the pollen is present, a food that may not normally cause any reaction suddenly becomes an issue. If that isn't enough, global climate changes are adding days and even weeks to the length of the allergy season. “We've seen a 10-day difference in the ragweed allergy season over the decade,” says Dr. Morris. “That is scary.” Knowing when the reactions start and stop will help pretreatment and help pinpoint the source.

Help is near

The good news is that advances in immunotherapy—where a small amount of an allergen is administered to a person to help them develop tolerance to it—provide safe options for allergy sufferers with minimal side effects. But immunotherapy is a year-round treatment

and ideally should start before the allergy season to help derail reactions. If you missed the timing for the immunotherapy, there are a number of good options for coping with seasonal allergies. “Saline rinses and neti pots help a great deal; over-the-counter antihistamines can help manage the symptoms, and nasal steroids offer relief as well,” explains Dr. Morris.

Watch what you eat

Food allergies are a bit more complex; they require awareness of changes in your system. “Mouth itching, hives, chronic diarrhea or diarrhea about an hour after you eat something are all signs you have a food allergy,” warns Dr. Morris. “Also, children with eczema have a high chance of having a food allergy.” Moreover, food allergies, if left unchecked, can become markedly worse over time, so catching them early can help avoid stronger reactions. Sublingual immunotherapy, commonly referred to as allergy drops (where the allergen is administered in drops under the tongue), is very effective in most cases and is showing hope even for those burdened with deadly peanut and nut allergies. Allergy Associates of La Crosse collaborated with Duke University to conduct the first peanut sublingual immunotherapy trial in 2005. Today, multiple research centers from around the country are further investigating food allergy treatment options. Today's allergists are making remarkable headway to alleviate the frustration, fear and foreboding associated with allergies. Allergy Associates of La Crosse and Dr. Mary Morris are among the leaders in the industry. Grounded in the innovative approaches of her father, Dr. David Morris, patients can expect a rigorous testing process and targeted immune therapy plan with the allergy drops to address the allergies that present problems for the immune system. (crw)

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