

Allergies

An allergy is an over-reactive response by the body's immune system to a substance that is not usually harmful to the body under normal conditions. This is why an allergic reaction to a substance can occur in one person, yet in another person that is subjected to the same substance, there is no reaction at all. IgE antibodies are formed in a person with allergic reactions, to fight off what the body perceives as the invader - this triggers the release of histamine and other inflammatory chemicals which produce the typical symptoms of allergic reactions.

Common allergens (substance that causes an allergic response):

- Pollen



- Dust / dust mites
- Mold
- Animal dander
- Insect venom
- Drugs (e.g. penicillin)
- Foods / food additives
- Chemicals (e.g. found in cosmetics, personal care and household products)

Symptoms of allergic responses may include any of the following:

- Skin rashes
- Itching
- Coughing
- Wheezing
- Nasal congestion
- Shortness of breath
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Dark circles under the eyes
- Nausea
- Stomach pain / discomfort



Factors that instigate or aggravate allergic responses:

- Stress
- Bowel flora imbalances and compromised gut integrity
- Poor digestion
- Adrenal fatigue
- Imbalances in immune function

Naturopathic approaches for allergies:

- Reduce inflammation





- Improve digestive function
- Improve bowel flora and gut integrity
- Improve adrenal function
- Address diet
- Reduce stress levels
- Address nutrient deficiencies
- Avoidance of allergens
- Improve functioning of eliminative pathways

Stress in Relation to Allergies

Stress can be an aggravating factor as well as a causative factor in allergic reactions.

How stress can be a causative factor of allergic reactions:

Under normal circumstances during times of stress the adrenal glands produce cortisol. Cortisol regulates immune responses and inflammatory reactions so that white blood cell activity that is activated in immune responses, and the chemicals produced by this activity, do not get out of control.

However, if stress goes on for long enough with no reprieve, adrenal function declines and the glands can no longer produce adequate amounts of hormones, including cortisol. A lack of cortisol means that an immune response cannot be effectively switched off, therefore the body becomes more prone to having an over-active immunity which can cause allergies and excessive inflammation.

Factors that aggravate allergies during stress:

- **Poor digestion** - during stress the body does not put energy into digestion as it is not a necessary process for immediate survival (fight-or-flight response).
- **Compromised intestinal flora** - stress can cause depletion of friendly gut bacteria which play an integral part in the body's immune system.
- **Nutrient depletion** - this can occur due to the effects of stress on digestion, as well as the body's increased need and usage of nutrients during stress.
- **Sub-optimal functioning of body systems** - The body has to work harder to maintain equilibrium when it is under stress. Allergic reactions are an internal form of stress on the body, therefore allergies become part of a vicious cycle whereby they are not only aggravated by stress but they also cause extra stress.
- **Mental and emotional trauma** - dealing with allergies can lead to negative emotions and thoughts which can further exacerbate stress levels which in turn exacerbates the allergy problem.



Ways to help alleviate stress:

- Yoga or tai chi
- Relaxation
- Meditation
- Deep breathing
- Good night's sleep
- Time out for enjoyable, fun activities
- Positive thoughts
- Avoidance of stressful situations
- Take a holiday
- Improve coping mechanisms
- Healthy diet



- Laughter
- Being in the company of people that make you feel good

Please talk to your naturopath for guidance in ways to reduce stress levels as circumstances vary in each individual.