

Allergies and Ayurveda

By Noah Volz

In *Ayurveda* the main causative factor of allergies is from improperly digested food called *Ama*. Allergies occur when a person's immune system mistakenly believes an antigen (allergen) is harmful. The dust, pollen, and even the smell of roses are attacked by the immune system. Antibodies are produced in response to these environmental allergens. Each antibody is specific to the dust, pollen, mold or dander that it is trying to protect the body from. When antibodies detect the substances in the body they alert the mast cells and basophiles to release chemicals such as histamines. This hypersensitivity reaction results in the sneezing, sniffing, and pile of tissues that surrounds some of us in the spring and fall [1].

In *Ayurveda* allergic symptoms are rarely caused by the allergens themselves. It is how our immune system reacts to these allergens that cause the vasodilatation, smooth muscle spasm, swelling and glandular secretions that characterize an allergic response. In *Ayurveda* the main causative factor of allergies is from improperly digested food called *Ama* [2]. *Ama* is a toxic substance that can block the channels of circulation, which are the body's main lines of communication. These lines of communication must be cleared so that the body can respond without the hyper-vigilance and overly defensive attack to these harmless substances.

Ayurveda clears the *Ama* in different ways depending on the unique characteristics of the person and their symptoms. Every allergy sufferer is different and Ayurvedic treatment will emphasize four steps uniquely tailored to the individual. These are to boost the digestive fire, adjust the diet to support full digestion, detoxify, and restore the strength of the immune system [3].

The science of *Ayurveda* recognizes three primary physical and energetic principles that govern the universe. These are the three *Doshas* of *Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*. How a person with allergies approaches a treatment depends on the predominance of one of these *Doshas* in that person's body.

Vata Causes

Vata types often experience dryness of the eyes and sinuses. As *Vata* types are all ready dry there is not much of a buffer of mucous to protect the tissues before they become irritated by the allergens. The

first line of allergic immunity is the production of mucous. Symptoms are often chronic and constant due to the deep mucosal dryness.

***Pitta* Causes**

Pitta types create a hypermetabolic state in order to burn off the Ama in the blood. This heat rises into the head and neck causing irritability and anger. The heat also finds its way to the sinuses where it dries them out and they become infected with toxic blood. These mucous lined air cavities respond by excreting everything that's in them.

***Kapha* Causes**

Kapha types are classically the most susceptible to allergies because the symptoms of allergies are *Kapha* in nature. Symptoms of *Kapha* include the production of congestion, fatigue, and malaise. The cause however of these symptoms, as discussed earlier, can be either *Vata* or *Pitta* and this diagnosis is crucial [4].

Treatment

In all cases we must remember that the condition is a systematic reflection of an internal weakness and not a localized event. Long-term treatment includes the four steps mentioned above. Symptomatic relief can be gained by taking green or black tea as a sympathomimetic. Sympathomimetics relax smooth muscle tissue spasms alleviating asthmatic bronchiole constriction and increase blood pressure. Another important treatment would be the administration of Vitamin C. Vitamin C has an antihistamine affect. The dose should be increased until loose stools occur and then reduced below that threshold. Other herbs that are beneficial for allergies are licorice, stinging nettle, frankincense, and turmeric. Licorice acts as an anti-inflammatory, expectorant, and restorative for the weakened adrenal gland. The role of adrenal fatigue in allergies has not been clearly established, but many have hypothesized it. Stinging Nettle has been found to be an anti-inflammatory and fever reducer. It contains a small amount of histamine and is a diuretic. Frankincense is an anti-inflammatory, astringent, diaphoretic, and stimulant. A study of 40 patients showed it to be beneficial in the treatment of asthma, reducing markers of inflammation and eosinophil counts [5]. Turmeric has a wide range of reported actions including: anti-inflammatory, antiviral, hypoglycemic, and hepatoprotective. Well-documented anecdotal evidence has shown it effective in symptomatic relief of allergies [5].

For long term care to boost the digestive fire, adjust the diet to support full digestion, detoxify, and restore the strength of the immune system, a few *Dosha* specific guidelines can be followed.

***Vata* Treatment**

Acute treatment for Vata is ginger or Chai Spice tea three to four cups a day. Triphala can be taken, a ½ tsp, per day, before bed. Long-term treatment of *Vata* includes avoiding dairy and wheat and replacing them with fruit and veggies. Drinking warm or hot water instead of cold water and adding lemon to the water. Eat your largest meal in the middle of the day and a smaller meal in the evening.

***Pitta* Treatment**

Cumin seed is used as a mild digestive stimulant either roasted or raw eaten throughout the day. ½ Teaspoon of turmeric powder in warm milk three times a day after meals helps clean the blood of any toxicity. ½ tsp Neem powder between meals can also be used as a detoxifier.

***Kapha* Treatment**

Long-term therapy is to maintain a liquid diet one day a week especially during allergy season. A liquid diet is blended fruits and vegetables that are drank at regular intervals throughout the day. Ginger and black pepper tea with honey should be drank 3 cups 3 times per day. Licorice can be taken with warm water after meals.

Endnotes

[1] Marc Halpern, Clinical Ayurvedic Medicine. 4 th ed. (Grass Valley: California College of Ayurveda, 2002). 7:21.

[2] John Douillard, Allergies, (Life Spa, 2003). 1

[3] Niika Quistgard-DeVivo, Sneeze-free, Naturally, (Yoga Journal, March/April 2005). 1

[4] Douillard, 3

[5] Halpern, 7:27