

# Runny Nose, Sneezing, Itchy Eyes...

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Welcome to Allergy Season!

Have you noticed lately when you're hiking through Lynn Canyon that you're requiring more Kleenex than usual?

The word *allergy* will spring to mind a seasonal reaction to pollen, grasses and weeds, or we may associate allergies with year-round reactions to dust, mold and dander from our furry loved ones. These have a similar underlying physiological mechanism that is also to blame for the common food allergy, notably the anaphylactic, life-threatening response to peanuts or penicillin. Less commonly known are food sensitivities that arise from our immune system's overproduction of immunoglobulin G antibodies in response to foods such as wheat, dairy, soy and yeast.

An environmental or food allergy causes symptoms ranging from wheezing and shortness of breath, to an itchy, swollen tongue or eyes, and involves mast cells (immune cells) release of histamine which creates a cascade of inflammatory reactions leading to fluid collection, itchiness and swelling. Over-the-counter antihistamines such as Benadryl and Claritin are conventionally recommended to halt the histamine release. I like to dig deeper and treat the root cause.

The following issues need to be assessed and treated in order to procure a lasting, drug-free resolution to allergies so that you and your children will remain symptom-free year-round and be able to partake in all the outdoor activities that Lynn Valley has to offer.

- **Toxin overload**

It's undeniable. We live in a toxic soup. It's only getting worse as 2,000 new synthetic chemicals are added to our environment ever year (most of them significantly lacking in long-term safety data!) Now, add to that: air pollution, BPA, lauryl sulfites, heavy metals, drinking water contaminants, PCBs, dioxins, pesticides, parabens, phthalates, alcohol, pharmaceutical medications, cigarette smoke, and exogenous sources of hormones such as bovine growth hormone, hormone replacement therapy, and oral contraceptives (this list is practically never-ending!)

Toxic buildup in the body alters the immune system's sensitivity. In other words, the immune system becomes hyper-reactive and more likely to create a pathological response to environmental or food antigens. A great first step for anyone deciding to take the natural approach to treatment is to do a three week liver, bowel, blood and kidney detoxification program. I find this extremely effective as we head out of winter and into the spring and summer allergy season. Naturopathic doctors tend to use a comprehensive approach that entails some or all of the following: a clean diet,

nutritional and herbal support, meditation and stress reduction, infrared saunas, exercise and sweating, and colon hydrotherapy. Even going for a hike around the Lynn Valley Loop at a higher intensity will allow the body to work up a sweat and contribute to detoxification.

- **Digestive dysbiosis & food sensitivities**

An imbalanced flora (protective bacteria that live in our small and large intestines) can contribute to self-intoxication as they metabolize the food we eat and produce toxic by-products that are absorbed through the walls of our intestines. These put our immune systems into a state of defense – reproducing and attacking and creating inflammatory cascades with positive feedback loops which keep the cell engaged in battle. Also, there is an overgrowth of pathogenic strains of bacteria, yeast and/or parasites; they maintain an environment in our gut which makes it difficult for our natural, protective flora to flourish. In a healthy digestive tract, the acidophilus and bifidobacteria outnumber the dysbiotic flora and are essential for maintaining a balanced immune system. Food sensitivities contribute to gut dysbiosis, inflammation in the walls of the intestines, and a permeable intestinal barrier, creating the perfect storm to rev up the immune system's reactivity. I recommend assessing for food sensitivities, either by using an elimination and challenge diet, or a simple, non-invasive, in-office food allergy test, and then eliminating the foods for a period of time while a "gut-healing" protocol is performed.

- **Adrenal fatigue**

You may be wondering, what the heck do the adrenal glands have to do with allergies? Actually, quite a bit! These small, triangular, endocrine glands sit atop the kidneys and maintain much of our normalcy as we deal with chronic stress throughout our lives. Stress to the body doesn't just come in the form of mental, emotional and psychological stress, but can be from blood sugar issues, toxins, cancer, physical activity, high blood pressure, viruses and bacteria. Some common symptoms that arise when the adrenal glands are fatigued are new or worsening allergies, feeling of "burnout", inability to exercise (exhausted), easily overwhelmed and emotional, decreased sex drive and a feeling of faintness upon moving from a sitting to standing position.

What are some methods to protect the adrenal glands from further burnout and support our body through stress? My favorites are: adaptogenic herbs (withania, rhodiola, ginseng and holy basil), nutrients which are quickly depleted during stress (such as vitamin C, vitamin B complex and zinc); reduction or abstaining from alcohol; caffeine; sugar and processed white flour products; plenty of sleep; moderate amounts of exercise; and lots of laughter and joy.

- **Nutrient deficiencies**

Common nutrient deficiencies are inadequate vitamin D and an imbalanced omega 3 to 6 ratio. Let's start with the vitamin D. Seventy-five percent of American adults have a vitamin D deficiency (diagnosed through blood tests) and certainly, with our reduced sun exposure and heavy year-round rainfall in the North Vancouver mountains, you can assume the same or worse. As the research continues to roll out on vitamin D, we're learning about its role in immune modulation and as a cancer-fighting hormone. I recommend patients take between 2,000 – 10,000 IUs of vitamin D for varying lengths of time depending on their state of deficiency and health concerns.

Fish oils contain omega 3 oils, which have a tendency to reduce inflammation in the body. The omega 6 oils tend to be pro-inflammatory and thus, a ratio of 1:1 of omega 3 to 6 oils is the ideal state to keep the immune system from over-reacting and preventing chronic degenerative illnesses. We obtain a heavy amount of omega 6's through vegetable oils – namely salad dressing, deep fried foods, and processed goods (muffins, cakes, crackers, etc.) I recommend a reduction of these types of foods and an increase in wild salmon, walnuts, flax seeds and flax oil, and fish oils (all rich in omega 3's) to help modulate the immune system and reduce allergenicity.

Of course, there are many specific nutrients and herbs that we use to treat the symptoms of allergies – my top 5 list is below – however, as a naturopathic doctor, my philosophy is to treat the root cause, remove obstructions to healing, and allow the body to naturally regain balance.

1. Vitamin C with bioflavonoids
2. Quercetin
3. Bromelain
4. Mushroom formula (including shiitake, maitake, reishi mushrooms)
5. *Astragalus membranaceus*

As we head toward the thick of allergy season, detoxify, support and strengthen your adrenal glands, and ensure adequate nutrient levels through food and supplementation to rebalance your immune system and eliminate allergies once and for all.

*Dr. Sacha Elliott is a naturopathic physician practicing in Lynn Valley at [Canopy Integrated Health](#) in the Lynn valley Village. Although she has a holistic family practice, she has a passion for treating digestive disorders and women's health using nutrition, herbs, lifestyle changes, supplements and acupuncture. She desires to create positive global changes, and does her part to make this happen by working to increase the health of individuals, one step at a time. For more information, visit her website at [www.dr.sachaelliott.com](http://www.dr.sachaelliott.com).*