

DR. MHAPANKAR'S EAR, NOSE, THROAT CLINIC & INSTITUTE FOR DEAFNESS & VERTIGO

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What is an allergy?

To understand what “allergy” means, let us use the analogy of the defence forces of our country. Just as we have the defence forces to protect our country from its enemies, we have the immune system within our body. Again, just as the country's defence forces are trained to identify the enemy and attack it, our immune system identifies the body's enemies like bacteria, virus etc. and eliminates them. The country's forces never attack our civilians, similarly our immune system ignores useful substances like food, and drugs and useless or harmless substances like pollen grains, dust and animal dander. However, if the immune system goes awry and reacts to such useful or harmless substances, then the person is said to have developed an allergy. Such substances, which are called allergens, may be inhaled, swallowed may come into contact with the skin. Approximately 25% of the population in India suffers from one or more allergic diseases. The distributing trend is on a tremendous increase in the incidence & severity of allergic diseases all over the world, including India.

Are allergies hereditary ?

Allergic diseases can develop at any age and heredity plays a key role in who develop it. If one parent has an allergic disease, the estimated risk of the child to develop allergies is 25% and the child's risk grows to 50% if both parents have allergies. Also an allergic mother is more likely to transfer the disease to the child than an allergic father.

An allergy is neither an infectious disease nor a contagious disease & is definitely not a crippling disease.

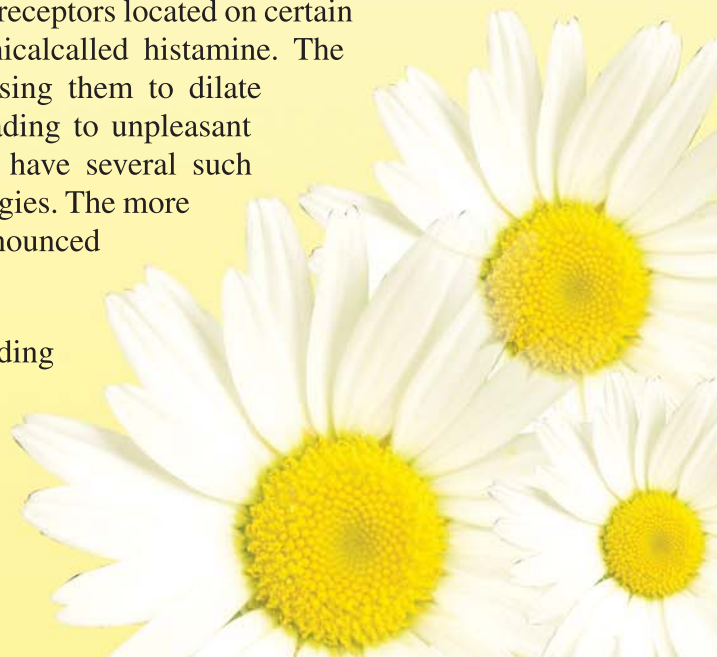
Why do I have allergies ?

When your body mistakes that is normally harmless for something dangerous, it tries to get rid of it the same way it fights off an invading bacteria or virus. Your body's attempt to get rid of the “allergen” (foreign substances) causes symptoms like sneezing, watery eyes and a running, stuffy, or itching nose. This is called an “allergic reaction”.

How do allergies develop?

Your immune system fights off harmful substances like bacteria and viruses by making antibodies to them. Each antibody recognizes and binds to one specific foreign substance, like key fitting into a lock. Millions of different antibodies circulate in your blood stream and are present throughout our body to fend off any unwanted substances. An antibody called IgE binds to receptors located on certain cells in the nasal lining which contain granules of a chemical called histamine. The released histamine latches on to nearby blood vessels, causing them to dilate (widen), resulting in swelling, redness and inflammation leading to unpleasant symptoms such as itchy, stuffy or running nose. You may have several such different IgE antibodies in your body, indicating multiple allergies. The more IgE antibodies you have to a specific substance, the more pronounced the reaction will be.

There is a misconception that everything under the sun including the sun cause allergy. The ultraviolet rays of the sun could certainly cause allergic reactions called “Photoallergy”. However, even existing substance certainly cannot cause an allergic reaction. Indeed, the numbers of known allergens are rather limited.



What are seasonal allergies ?

If you have seasonal allergies (hay fever or seasonal allergic rhinitis) you are allergic to pollen from trees, grasses or weeds that are carried by the wind. Your symptoms arise during the pollinating season for those particular plants. You can have allergies to more than one thing. The symptoms may get worse more often than once each year; e.g. you may have difficulty in the spring due to tree pollen. But have no relief in the autumn because you are also allergic to weeds. Your doctor can help you to pin point what the causes of your allergies are, & how best to treat them.

What are perennial allergies ?

If you have "perennial allergies", you are allergic to something that affects you year around & does not change with the season-such as dust mites, which can be found in mattresses; pet dander or pet saliva; or mould as spores which can be throughout your home. Your symptoms may bother you continuously, or they may flare up several times throughout the year. If you suffer year round & your symptoms worsen seasonally, your symptoms may be caused by a combination of seasonal as well as perennial allergens.

Allergies are seen to affect only a few organs of the body viz. eyes, nose, lungs, skin & intestines. The nasal form of allergy, which presents itself in the form of sneezing, watery discharge & nasal obstruction in most of the cases, is due to inhalants and food allergens. This nasal form of allergy is called as "**ALLERGIC RHINITIS**".

Allergic rhinitis is the commonest allergy in clinical practice & constitutes approximately 55% of all allergies seen in India.

The following treatment will help you to control your symptoms :

1) If any of these following allergens are responsible for bouts of sneezing & watery discharge from the nose, you are allergic to it. So avoid it.

List of common allergens

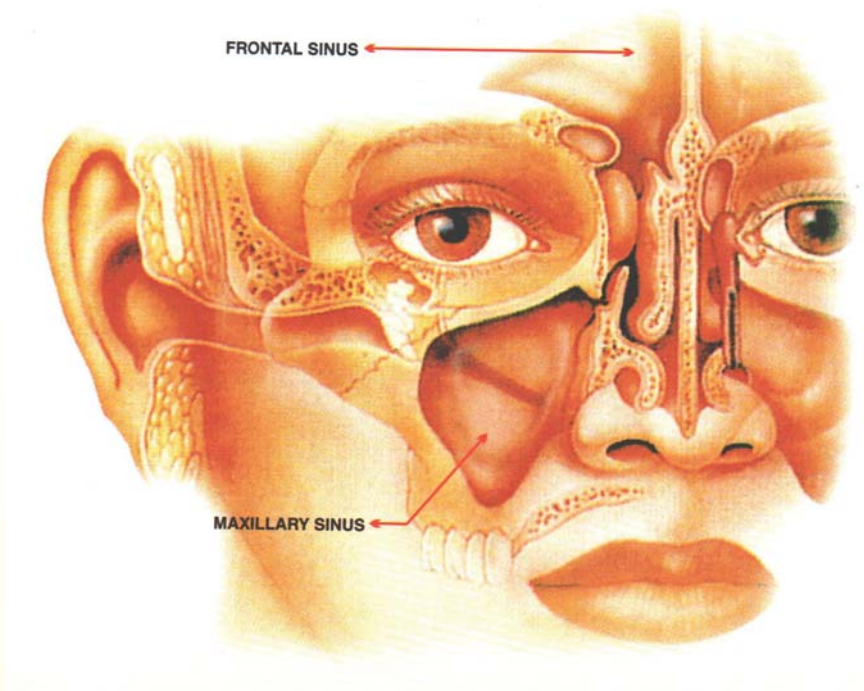
a) INHALENTS

- House dust mites (tiny bugs you can't see that live in your home)
- Powder
- Moulds in your home or in air outside
- Animal dander - proteins from furry pets which are found in their skins secretions (dander), saliva & urine (it is actually not their hair)
- Cockroach droppings
- Perfumes
- Flowers
- Silky cotton
- Fresh paint
- Oils
- Nylon
- Plastic
- Soaps & soap powder
- Chemical fumes
- Lawns - (grass pollen, weedpollen & tree pollen)
- Sheep wool
- Grain dust
- Paper dust
- Feathers
- Kumkum

b) FOODS

- Milk Powder
- Mawa Sweets
- Corn (maize)
- Gram flour
- Chocolates
- Banana
- Mosambi
- Orange
- Tomato
- Cucumber
- Guava/Water-melon
- Papaya
- Pineapple
- Cashewnut
- Peanut
- Coconut
- Soyabean
- Almonds
- Pista
- Mushroom
- Icy foods
- Paneer
- Betelnut
- Eggs
- Prawns/Crabs
- Scaly fish
- Bangdafish
- Surmai fish
- Beet-root
- Brinjal
- Curds





2) Cyclic Rotatory diet:

- 1) The food to which you are allergic, should not be ingested more often than once in four days.
- 2) Use cooking oil strictly from packed tins, and not loose.
- 3) Possibility of adulteration in flour mill should be borne in mind & flour should not be more than 8 days old.
- 4) Do not use water from earthen ware pots (Matka).
- 5) Do not use woollen clothes or blankets while sleeping.
- 6) If you are allergic to any drugs, please inform your doctor accordingly.

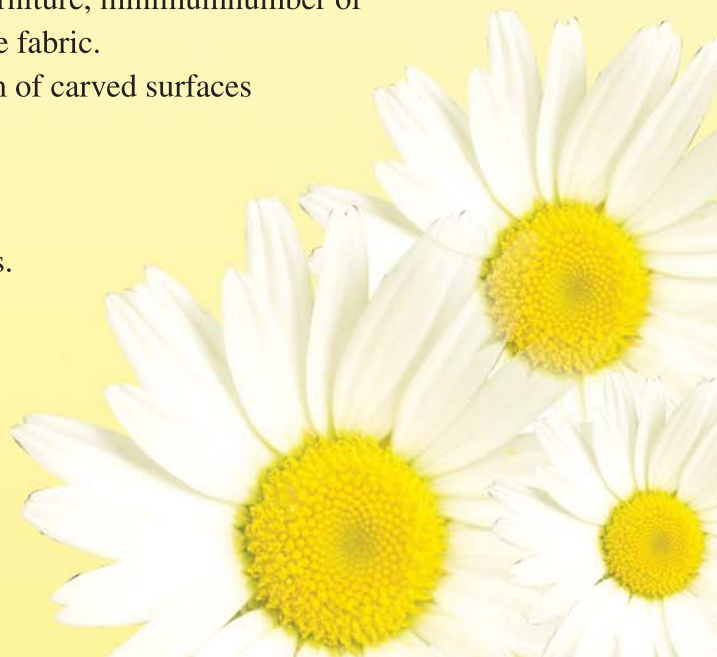
Tips for allergy patients

INSIDE YOUR HOME

- 1) Clean all filters, air conditioner filters and dust filters at each season
- 2) Replace venetian blinds and pleated curtains with roll down shades.
- 3) Avoid keeping pets in the house.
- 4) Use damp cloth to dust your house.
- 5) Add a mould preventive agent to paint & choose a mould resistant wallpaper paste to prevent walls from supplying a steady stream of allergens.
- 6) Use dacron / Polyester blankets instead of wool or cotton; wash often in hot water.
- 7) Put mattresses, box springs and pillows in plastic case.
- 8) Repair any plumbing leaks to reduce mould formation.
- 9) Carefully read labels on hair sprays, perfumes, shaving lotions, underarm deodorants - they may contain allergens.
- 10) Close your window at night since air carries more pollen.

Preparation of Dust free Bedroom

- 1) The room should contain a simple bed and minimum furniture, minimum number of curtains, pillows and rugs, each made of easily washable fabric.
- 2) Use simple wooden furniture with an absolute minimum of carved surfaces ornaments and upholstery.
- 3) Remove carpets, drapes and clothes from room.
- 4) Eliminate from the room all dust catching articles like stuffed toys, statues, venetian blinds and stuffed animals.
- 5) Pillows should be synthetic or foam rubber and not of feathers or silky cotton.
- 6) Mattresses and pillows should be covered with dust proof casing eg. vinyl or plastic.
- 7) Avoid perfumes, cosmetics and flowers in the room.



- 8) No pets should be allowed in the room.
- 9) Keep out of the room when it is being dusted or cleaned or wear a wet mask over the nose.
- 10) Walls, floors and window sills should be washed & mopped.
- 11) Curtains & bedsheets should be washed & laundered frequently to remove house dust mite within them.
- 12) All furniture should be cleaned with wet mop.
- 13) An airconditioner if fitted helps exclude dust and pollens.
- 14) Wet patches of ceiling & walls should be removed through water proofing.

Remember : AN ADULT SPENDS UPTO 40% & A CHILD
60-70% OF HIS TIME IN THE BED ROOM

OUTSIDE YOUR HOME

- 1) Perform low level exercise daily to help mobilize sinus & bronchial secretions.
- 2) Wear a mask over mouth & nose when mowing the lawn.
- 3) Pollen counts are highest in the morning. Plan outdoor activities for the afternoon if possible.

Dispelling Allergy Myths

1) Hay Fever is Caused by Hay

The popular term “Hay Fever” is considered a misnomer because the condition is not caused by hay, nor is it a fever. The term was coined in 1982 by a British Physician when he noticed his allergy symptoms worsened during British Hay season. Today this term is used to describe nasal congestion, coughing, running nose, sneezing, breathing difficulties and other symptoms caused by any plants that pollinate or moulds that produce spores - usually in late spring, summer or autumn.

2) Short Haired Animal’s Don’t Cause Allergies

Neither an animal’s fur, nor it’s length, is the culprit in allergies. The real culprit is a protein bound in the animal’s saliva or skin. Cats often cause more allergy problems than dogs simply because they tend to lick their fur a lot, spreading the protein onto their coats. Rodents and rabbits may also be allergenic.

3) Pollen From Flowers Is a Leading Cause of Allergy

Ironically, some of the most feared plants - the brightly flowering varieties are the least likely to trigger allergic symptoms. Pollen from roses & many other fragrant colourful flowers tends to be heavy, waxy and sticky, making them less likely to become airborne. These pollen are not spread by the wind. Instead, insects transport pollen from flower to flower. Allergies to these plants are very uncommon (even among florists & Gardeners who are exposed to them frequently)

***If you observe discipline
there is no need for medicine.***

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