

## Allergies – What's a Person to Do?

Spring is a wonderful season, with new growth, fabulous flowers, and beautiful white and pink tree buds. But does your nose itch or do you have a watery discharge? Watery eyes? Endless sneezing? Better on rainy days and worse on clear, windy days? Worse outdoors and better inside with air conditioning? These symptoms of a pollen allergy seem to make the great outdoors a bit less pleasant. Molds and animal dander are other examples of common allergens, and the combination of a few of them is not an uncommon problem. You can control some of the symptoms with some home remedies and a few items from your favorite health food store.

There have been some positive studies from Switzerland, Germany, and the US that demonstrate the effectiveness of some of the commonly used herbal remedies, as well as some nutrients and other easy-to-manage remedies. Consider the *Urtica* species, more commonly known as nettles. While many who wander out in the spring fields and inadvertently come across and suffer a brief, but none-the-less uncomfortable interaction with young nettle plants, may not look so kindly upon the plant, it does have a positive aspect. Nettles are known for their stinging nature, derived from the little hairs that produce formic acid, leading to the name “stinging nettles.” Looking beyond this, perhaps, less than inviting attribute, nettles have been found to have some very desirable characteristics.



Young nettle leaves, picked in the spring and cooked, taste a bit like spinach, and are highly nutritious. They contain more protein than most plants grown in temperate regions, and have significant amounts of iron and trace minerals. It was used by Dioscorides for the treatment of pleurisy and pneumonia, and other ailments related to inflammation. For allergies, nettles have been used to reduce mucus in the nasal passages and thin that which is produced in the bronchial airways, allowing easier breathing. In addition, nettles are known for their use with gout, anemia, and some kidney ailments.

The health benefit of nettles is best achieved by preserving the formic acid content, which is depleted quickly after picking if not quickly preserved. Freeze-

dried nettles appear to be more effective than simply dried nettle leaf for allergy symptoms.

#### Cream of Nettle soup

Don't worry - they don't sting when cooked! Nettles are very nutrient rich and of course - free! Don't gather them beside a busy road where they will have been contaminated by traffic fumes - we pick them in our garden. If you keep cutting them from springtime you get a regular supply of fresh leaves. Though we stop using them into summer as they seem to attract insects.

#### Ingredients:

2 tablespoons of vegan margarine or oil

2 tablespoons of white flour

1 onion, roughly chopped

2 cloves garlic, chopped

Freshly picked and washed young nettles (several good handfuls - picked with gloves and caution!)

2 cups soya milk

1 cup water or stock

salt and pepper to taste

Fry the onion and garlic in the oil or marg. for a few minutes then stir in the nettles (no need to chop or remove stalks) until they soften. Stir in the flour and gradually add the soya milk and water or stock, stirring all the time. Add seasonings and liquidize. Delicious...

Other herbs to consider in fighting the symptoms of spring allergies include *Euphrasia* (Eyebright), *Achillea millefolium* (Yarrow), and the *Mahonia* species (Oregon grape.) Their actions include anti-inflammatory, decongestant, astringent, antimicrobial, and immune-enhancing.

A combination of Chinese remedies is also currently under study for its effectiveness in treating allergies. The most familiar of the three ingredients is *Ganoderma lucidum*, or Reishi mushroom.



Nutrients to consider include vitamin C and the bioflavonoid Quercetin in the process of reducing allergic reactions. Vitamin C helps to reduce allergic symptoms and reduce inflammatory reactions, with an antihistamine-like effect. It is essential to a wide variety of chemical reactions, including the development of compounds that are needed to combat the effects of stress on the body, and specifically, allergic reactions. Quercetin helps to stabilize those cells which are involved in allergic reactions, reducing such symptoms as watery eyes and nasal discharge.

There are a variety of homeopathic remedies commonly used for the treatment of allergies as well. Each remedy has specific characteristics by which a practitioner will determine the most appropriate remedy. The more commonly used remedies include *Allium cepa*, *Arsenicum album*, *Euphrasia*, *Pulsatilla*, *Ambrosia*, *Apis*, and *Arum triphyllum*.

Other anti-allergy therapies to consider include the use of a Neti pot with saline solution for nasal lavage. This process increases the nasal and sinus passage exposure to the saline solution than the simple misting effect of commercially obtained spray applications.

Careful attention should also be given to dusting, vacuuming, air filters, keeping pets out of the bedroom, and other activities that can reduce exposure to offending allergens.



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