

Vail Daily

Vail Natural Heath: Allergies — immune system on overdrive

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VAIL, Colorado — Is it a cold? Or allergies? If your runny nose and sneezing linger for more than a week or two, there's a good chance it's allergies. If you have allergies, your immune system, your body's defense system against bacteria and viruses, is on overdrive. It's reacting to a normally innocuous substance such as pollen, trees, grasses or ragweed as if it's a foreign invader. Often it's bugged by more than one thing such as pollen, dust mites, mold spores, pet dander or even food.

In order to defend the body, the immune system produces antibodies called immunoglobulin E, or IgE. These antibodies attach to the body's mast or tissue cells and basophils, or blood cells. When an allergen like pollen encounters its unique IgE, it fits like a key into a lock and releases histamines that result in inflammation and all the uncomfortable symptoms of allergies like a runny nose, sneezing, nasal congestion, itching, rash, swelling and even asthma.

If your parents are allergy prone, you may be too. Or you can develop them when your resistance is low when you're under stress. A severe allergic reaction is called anaphylaxis.

The most common substances that can provoke seasonal allergies in Colorado include trees such as elm, cottonwood, cedar, juniper, pine and aspen. And other plants such as ragweed, pollen, thistle and sage.

Other substances that can provoke an allergy include: Nickel, cosmetics, lanolin, animal dander, dust, dust mites, some common drugs such as penicillin, aspirin and sulfa drugs, some food additives such as benzoic acid and sulfites and chemicals found in soap and laundry detergents.

Many people are allergic to molds. Molds can live throughout the house, under the sink and in the bathroom, basement, refrigerator or any dark and damp place. Mold spores are carried in the wind and are predominate in the summer and early fall. Cutting grass, harvesting crops or walking through tall vegetation can provoke a reaction.

Foods can also provoke allergic reactions. Some of the most common allergenic foods include chocolate, dairy products, eggs, shellfish, strawberries, citrus fruits, corn, wheat, food additives, preservatives and dyes.

What kind of natural treatments are available for environmental allergies? I use homeopathy to desensitize a person from their specific environmental allergies. I also use natural anti-inflammatory products and Chinese herbs depending upon how severe the reaction.

What is the difference between a food intolerances and food allergy? A person with a food intolerance is unable to digest and process food correctly, usually due to a lack of a certain enzyme or enzymes. A food allergy occurs when a person's immune system generates an antibody response to the injected food. Food intolerances can lead to an allergy, if particles of undigested food manage to enter the bloodstream and cause a reaction.

There are many symptoms related to food allergies these include: Recurrent colds, sore throats, chronic tonsillitis, ear infections, ringing and buzzing in the ears, chronic nasal congestion, postnasal drip, Meniere's syndrome, constipation, diarrhea, abdominal cramping, ulcerative colitis, gallbladder disease, irritable bowel disease, migraines and other headaches, hives, canker sores, psoriasis, eczema, acne, asthma, frequent urination, teeth grinding, bedwetting, colic, muscle aches, osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, unexplained fatigue, anxiety, depression, insomnia, food cravings, obesity etc.

Most of these disorders have more than one cause, but food allergy is a relatively common and frequently overlooked cause.

Food allergies are best tested through a blood test. The skin scratch test is used mainly for environmental allergies. A person can become allergic to almost any type of food and any combination of foods. Therefore, an accurate diagnosis is important.

Environmental and food allergies do not go away on their own. If left untreated, allergies tend to get worse every year. Allergies can be treated successfully by improving your overall immune function, desensitizing a person from environmental allergies, eliminating the allergen and improving digestion and overall intestinal health.

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