

Acupuncture And Allergies

Seasonal Allergies and Acupuncture

Acupuncture has been used to treat seasonal allergies for centuries with great success. According to traditional medicine, treatment is directed toward clearing the nasal passages, supporting the immune system and strengthening the systems of the body to prevent allergic reactions from recurring.

What are Seasonal Allergies?

Commonly called hay fever or allergic rhinitis, a seasonal allergy is an allergic reaction to a trigger that is typically only present for part of the year, such as spring or fall. Pollens that are spread by the wind are usually the main cause of seasonal allergies. People who are allergic to pollens are also often sensitive to dust mites, animal dander, and molds.



Spring is traditionally the main season when allergies blossom because of new growth on trees and weeds. But fall, with a whole different set of blooming plants as well as leaf mold, is a close second.

About 26 million Americans endure chronic seasonal allergies, while the number of people with milder symptoms may be as high as 40 million, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

Seasonal allergies are caused by the body's hypersensitivity to substances in the environment. Symptoms involve primarily the membrane lining the nose, causing allergic rhinitis, or the membrane lining the eyelids and covering the whites of the eyes, causing allergic conjunctivitis.

While there are many Western medications to treat the symptoms of seasonal allergies, these treatments can cause unwanted side effects, such as drowsiness and immune system suppression as well as an over-reliance on medications. These side effects have drawn many people to search for an alternative approach, such as acupuncture and Oriental medicine to manage their allergies.

How Acupuncture Treatments Provide Relief from Allergies

According to Oriental Medicine, allergic rhinitis is related to Wind and a deficiency of the Protective Wei Qi. Wei Qi is the Qi that flows at the surface of the body as a protective

sheath and is responsible for resistance to colds and other respiratory infections. People with a deficiency of Wei Qi catch colds easily and are more susceptible to allergens.

When treating with acupuncture, underlying imbalances within the body are addressed and a treatment plan is developed to relieve the acute symptoms of allergic rhinitis while also treating the root problems that are contributing to the body's reaction to allergens. Treatments often include dietary modification, the use of specifically chosen herbal formulas, and acupuncture.

Studies on Acupuncture for Allergies

There have been several studies that confirm the efficacy of acupuncture and herbal medicine for allergic rhinitis.

One such study recently published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* showed that acupuncture can significantly relieve allergic rhinitis symptoms.

In the study, 5,237 men and women were analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of acupuncture in addition to routine care in patients with allergic rhinitis compared with treatment with routine care alone.

In this trial, patients with allergic rhinitis were randomly allocated to receive acupuncture for a 3 month period or to a control group that received no acupuncture. All patients were allowed to receive usual medical care.



Improvements were noted at the 3 month and the 6 month evaluation for the patients receiving acupuncture. The authors of this trial concluded that treating patients with allergic rhinitis in routine care with additional acupuncture leads to clinically relevant and persistent benefits.

Another study that was published in *Allergy: European Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology* found that hay fever sufferers who received weekly acupuncture treatments and took three daily doses of medical herbal tea showed fewer symptoms and were less likely to say their hay fever was infringing on their daily activities than people who received placebo treatment. After six weeks it was found that 85 percent of patients showed overall improvements in their hay fever, compared with only 40 percent of the placebo group.

Sources:

Allergy: *European Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*. September, 2004

American Journal of Epidemiology. November, 2008

Foods for Seasonal Allergies

Ginger: Ginger is a natural antihistamine and decongestant. It may provide some relief from allergy symptoms by dilating constricted bronchial tubes.

Apples: Some foods, including apples, contain the flavanoid, quercetin that can cross-react with tree pollen. Quercetin can reduce allergic reactions by having an antihistamine effect. It also decreases inflammation. Quercetin occurs naturally in certain foods, such as apples (with the skin on), berries, red grapes, red onions, capers, and black tea.



Carrots: Carotenoids are a family of plant pigments that include beta-carotene. A lack of carotenoids in the diet is thought to promote inflammation in your airways. Good sources of carotenoids include apricots, carrots, pumpkin, sweet potato, spinach, kale, butternut squash, and collard greens.

Omega-3: Omega-3 essential fatty acids can counter the formation of chemicals that cause inflammation of the air passages. Good natural sources include flaxseed oil and salmon.

Yogurt: Food sensitivities seem to be connected with seasonal allergies. In a study conducted at the University of California, patients who were fed 18 to 24 ounces of yogurt a day experienced a decline in their environmental allergic symptoms by 90 percent.

Fiber: A healthy and active colon can decrease food sensitivity, which, in turn, can lighten the burden on your immune system and may reduce the impact of seasonal allergies. For maximum colon health, increase the fiber in your diet.