



# Health Beat

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- ◆ Sexual Health Awareness Workshops (SHAW) are offered on:  
Tuesdays  
10:00am-12:00pm  
&  
Wednesdays  
3:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.
- ◆ Free and confidential HIV and STD testing and counseling are offered on the following Thursdays:  
February 13  
March 6  
March 13  
April 10  
May 1  
May 8  
May 15  
June 12
- ◆ Nutrition Counseling begins on March 3, 2003.
- ◆ Men's Health Clinic appointments now available.

## What are Allergies?

Many people suffer from annoying allergy symptoms: stuffy nose, headaches, and even hives. They make us fear from the tiniest piece of food to the tree and flowers on our own lawns. Allergies are the cause for many discomforts that many people deal with but, what exactly are they?

### What is an Allergy?

An allergy is simply a mistake made by the immune system. When the immune system is too sensitive, it detects a harmless substance as threatening, and then attacks the substance in an exaggerated manner.<sup>1</sup> The problem that this causes is the discomfort to the person and can even affect to the point of complete malfunction of the organism that is supposedly being protected. The cause of

this discomfort is an allergic reaction.

An allergic reaction is a series of events that happen in the body. We associate these symptoms a person suffers when exposed to the substance a person is allergic to (an allergen). From the first time the body is exposed to the allergen, the body begins to produce IgE antibodies.<sup>2</sup> Within one week to 10 days the body is able to react against the allergen. The IgE antibodies attached to the surfaces of the basophils and mast cells detect the allergen and then alert proteins that circulate through the blood. These proteins then destroy the threatening substance.<sup>2</sup> This function is normal for destroying disease cells, but in the case of allergic reactions what are being destroyed are the mast cells and basophils. When these are

**Noemi Orozco**

destroyed, histamine and other allergy mediators are discharged into the nearby tissues and blood. Common allergy symptoms are itching, hives, sneezing, wheezing, nausea, diarrhea, and vomiting.

### Types of Allergies

There are many different types of allergies, some are common and some are extremely rare. Many people suffer from seasonal, respiratory allergies, which usually occur in the fall or spring and are caused by dust, mold, and pollen.<sup>1</sup>

Food allergies are also common and greatly diverse. These allergies are especially hard to identify due to the fact that they express themselves in many different ways.

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## Preventing Allergies

Several people suffer from allergies. Unfortunately, there is no cure, but there are ways to prevent them from flaring up.

Cigarette smoke is known to be one of the most common allergens. Usually people with allergies are more sensitive to cigarette smoke because it intensifies aller-

gies. The toxins in the cigarette smoke cause allergic complications, such as sinusitis or bronchitis.<sup>1</sup> The obvious and most effective way to prevent this is to stop smoking, or to seek smoke-free environments, such as in restaurants or theaters. Remove yourself from certain closed-in areas if someone has cho-

sen to light up so that you won't inhale secondhand smoke.

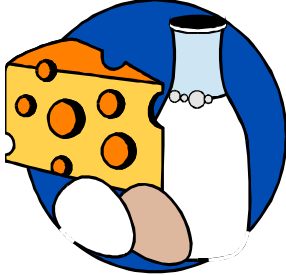
Staying clear of dust mites (which are microscopic relatives of the spider and live on mattresses, bedding, upholstered furniture, carpets, and curtains) is another way of preventing allergies.<sup>2</sup>

*(Continued on Page 3)*

**Maya Hill**

## What are Allergies?

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"According to researchers, food allergies affect almost 7 million people in the United States."<sup>4</sup>

According to *Harvard Women's Health Watch*, most food allergies begin in childhood, but adults can also develop an allergy to a food that was formerly harmless.<sup>3</sup>

Common allergenic foods are shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, eggs, milk, soy, and wheat. Foods with hidden allergens and meals at restaurants are particularly dangerous for patients with food allergies.<sup>5</sup> According to researchers, food allergies affect almost 7 million people in the United States.<sup>4</sup> If you think you might be allergic to something, ask your doctor.

Be sure to notice what

triggers your symptoms, what times of the year are problematic, and what is pollinating in your area. Also take note of foods you ingested prior to the onset of the allergy symptoms.<sup>1</sup>

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## Treating Your Allergies

Heidi Burkey



"...testing can determine which allergens the patient is sensitive to and an allergist can prescribe medications as necessary to ease your symptoms."

If you are a sufferer of seasonal allergies, there are remedies available to ease your pain. In the United States, approximately 10 to 30% of adults have seasonal allergies.<sup>1</sup> Both pharmaceutical and naturopathic remedies are available to the patients who suffer from a variety of allergies.

Prevention is one of the best ways to avoid allergy symptoms and testing can determine which allergens the patient is sensitive to. An allergist can prescribe medications as necessary to ease symptoms of the allergies if prevention does not work.

Immunotherapy, also known as allergy shots, is an injection given by a physician to patients with moderate to severe allergies. These shots usually build allergen tolerance in the body. Patients must remain in the doctor's office for approximately 30 minutes after receiving the injection due to possible life-threatening reac-

tions.<sup>3</sup>

Antihistamines can be purchased over-the-counter or prescribed by a physician and can be very effective. Histamine is the chemical that the body releases in response to the allergen, which causes sneezing, runny nose, and itchy eyes. Antihistamines should be taken every day during the allergy season to prevent symptoms. These drugs can also cause a variety of unpleasant side effects such as drowsiness and insomnia.<sup>3</sup> It is recommended that antihistamines be taken before bedtime to reduce this possible side effect.<sup>3</sup>

Anti-allergy nasal sprays, such as corticosteroids and cromolyn, are other treatments for allergy symptoms. If these are prescribed by a physician, these nasal sprays should be used every day before allergy season begins and continued on a daily basis. Corticosteroids work by stop-

ping the allergic reaction and reducing swelling in the nose and the secretion of mucous. Cromolyn medication inhibits the release of histamines and thereby halting the allergy symptoms. Common side effects are sneezing, itchy mild dryness or burning in the nose, an unpleasant taste in the mouth, nosebleeds and headaches.<sup>3</sup>

A decongestant, which is available over-the-counter, can reduce allergy symptoms; however, this method does not actually stop the histamines from being released. Relief of nasal congestion occurs by reducing the swelling in the nasal tissues. They have such common side effects as nervousness, insomnia, and irritation or drying out of the nasal passages.<sup>3</sup>

Naturopathic treatments are used to support and improve body functions and to eventually alleviate the symptoms. Diet is an important part of reducing allergy symptoms.

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## Treating Your Allergies *(Cont. from Page 2)*

One remedy is to remove dairy, alcohol, caffeine, chocolate, peanuts, red meat, sugar, wheat, food colorings, bananas and citrus fruit from the diet. Drinking one-half of your body weight in ounces of water on a daily basis is also recommended.<sup>4</sup>

Since herbal supplements may have side effects, including possible drug interactions, it is important to research the dosages required to have positive outcomes. Your local health food store should be able to provide more information, including literature. Some suggested supplements are bioflavonoids, flaxseed oil, probiotics, Vitamin A, C, E and Zinc. High quality herbal medicines such as Dong Quai, Eyebright, Gingko, Milk Thistle, Red Clover, Stinging Net-

tles, and Yarrow are recommended in a tea or tincture form. Homeopathic remedies come in the form of small pellets that can be purchased at your local health food store; they include *allium cepa*, *euphrasia*, *natrum muriaticum*, *nux vomica*, and *wyethia*.<sup>4</sup>

Another alternative allergy treatment is hydrotherapy, which includes castor oil packs, hot footbaths, nasal lavage, and using a cold cloth on the forehead. Acupuncture, desensitization therapy (i.e., bee pollen and homeopathic remedies), and exercise (aerobic exercise) are also alternative methods that may provide relief of allergies.<sup>4</sup>

If removing or eliminating the allergen from your life is not possible, seek relief from a health food store or a

physician. Alternative or natural remedies can be tried before taking pharmaceutical drugs, so as not to load the body with unnecessary chemicals. Side effects can make the pharmaceutical treatment methods a negative experience. However, the pharmaceutical medicines are usually very effective at treating the allergies and their symptoms. Successful treatment methods will vary for each person, but there is no longer a reason to suffer with allergies.

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“Successful treatment methods will vary for each person, but there is no longer a reason to suffer with allergies.”

## Preventing Allergies *(Cont. from Page 1)*

These small insects feed on the flakes of skin that people and pets shed. There is no way of getting rid of the dust mites, but there are ways that you can decrease their quantity. Dead skin flakes are commonly found in bedding and blankets. To reduce the number of dust mites, wash all bedding at least once a week.

Being that our campus is full of beautiful landscaping, great levels of tree and grass pollen exist. Grass pollen often exasperates allergies. Many peoples’ allergies are aggravated by the seasonal changes, due to the fluctuation of temperature grass and tree pollen levels. Certain times of the day and rain can also affect

the levels of pollen. In order to avoid an allergic reaction refrain from going out during 5:00 a.m.-10:00 a.m., because pollen levels are highest at this time.<sup>1</sup>

Dust is another common irritant of allergies. The mixture of fibers and particles can cause an allergic reaction. Dusting rooms once every week with a moistened cloth will cut down on the level of dust. Be sure to protect your eyes and nose with a dust mask and your hands with gloves when cleaning the house. Also, get rid of unnecessary wicker baskets, stuffed animals, dried flowers and other objects that collect dust.

Our four-legged members of the family are also known for causing allergy aggravation. Many people think

that pet fur and feathers are what irritates allergies, but in actuality the proteins in saliva (which sticks to fur when animals lick themselves) is what causes it.<sup>3</sup> Flakes of dry skin and aerosolized urine from animals also contribute to allergic reactions. The best way to avoid flare-ups caused by pets is to keep them out of bedrooms and other carpeted rooms. Make sure you thoroughly wash your hands after interactions with any animal and always try to avoid contact with soiled cages and litter. Being aware of allergens and irritants can help reduce allergic reactions.

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“These small insects feed on the flakes of skin that people and pets shed.”

Health Resource Center  
Student Health Services, Room 268  
CSULB Division of Student Services

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*Happy  
Valentine's  
Day!!*

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