

A-a-a...tishoo! Summer's here!

Emerging from the longest and coldest winter for many years, most of us will welcome the increase in temperatures which heralds the approach of summer. Outdoor pursuits and leisure time spent in the garden are such a welcome change from fighting the sub-Arctic elements of the winter months in northern climes.

We rush out and buy fuel for the dusted down barbecue and stock up on foods for outdoor cooking in the hope that the weather will oblige.

However, for the 12 million or so hayfever sufferers in the UK, it also means stocking up on boxes of tissues for the start of several months of sneezing, itchy eyes and runny noses.

Hayfever is known medically as allergic rhinitis. It is caused by the body's immune system over-reacting to pollen, and sometimes moulds, resulting in irritation and inflammation. The defending soldiers of our immune system attack any invading airborne plant proteins (antigens) and bind them to an antibody produced in the blood called IgE.

This IgE-antigen complex triggers release of histamine from specialised white blood cells known as mast cells. Histamine is the culprit responsible for all the irritating symptoms of hayfever.

How can we help ourselves?

Usual approaches include reducing the time we may be exposed to pollen and using antihistamines where necessary.

To add to this armoury, it is useful to remember that there are some key nutrients and herbs which we may include in our diet to help quell inflammation and heal mucous membranes and alleviate symptoms.

- Vitamin C rich foods – these include bright red, orange, yellow and dark green vegetables and fruit. Vitamin C can reduce overall histamine production, and is therefore considered to be a natural antihistamine
- *Urtica doica* – the humble stinging nettle is one of the most unlikely but effective remedies known for allergic reactions. Herbal teabags mean you can avoid its feisty sting!
- Oil the wheels – eat foods rich in omega 3 and 6 essential fats which can be found in oily fish, nuts, seeds and their oils. These contain hormone-like chemicals with anti-inflammatory properties

- Garlic and onions – these are a good source of quercetin, another powerful anti-inflammatory that stabilises the membranes of the cells that release histamine and therefore can help alleviate allergic symptoms. Vitamin C plus quercetin is a powerful combination.
- Ginger may also slow histamine production and a few slices can be put in hot water with lemon or added to cooking
- Bilberry extracts are rich in bioflavonoids which promote the delivery of oxygen to the eye area, a process which tends to be impeded in people suffering from the “allergic shiners” of hayfever
- Local honey on the basis of desensitisation – works for some people but the jury is still out on this one
- Limit the consumption of mucous-promoting dairy products
- Drink plenty of water to help flush through allergens

Finally, research from Japan has shown that kissing can reduce the body’s production of histamine. Cuddles alone did not have the same effect. So, this summer if all else fails... “pucker up”!

Thelma Middleton

BSc(Hons) Nutritional Therapy

Consulting at The Centre For Complementary Therapies

Kinmylies, Inverness

Tel: 01381 600534

www.nutritionalhealthpractice.co.uk

email: info@nutrihealthpractice.co.uk



THELMA MIDDLETON