

# Delta Gamma Well Aware

Encompasses eight dimensions: Social, Spiritual, Physical, Emotional, Vocational, Intellectual, Financial and Leadership Development



## Seasonal Outdoor Allergies

Are you one of the 40 million Americans suffering?

### What is hay fever?

- Hay fever, or seasonal allergic rhinitis, is an immune response brought on by airborne substances like plant pollens and mold spores.
- You develop an allergy when your immune system becomes ultra-sensitive to a normally harmless substance.
- Once this happens, your immune system will overreact every time it is exposed, even to very small amounts.
- Some people are genetically predisposed to having allergies and others may develop them in response to the environment.
- The “hygiene hypothesis” theorizes that allergies are the price we pay for protecting our children from germs with modern sanitation and antibiotics; their lack of exposure to allergens makes the immune system ultra-sensitive later on in life.
- Symptoms of hay fever include sneezing, runny nose, itchy eyes, stuffy sinuses and tickling throats.
- Hay fever can not be cured but there are effective ways to prevent and treat it.

### Common Allergens

#### Pollen

- Pollen is the tiny male reproductive cells of flowering plants and is ideally suited to travel through the air.
- Pollen season can begin as early as January in the southern states and further north may begin in March or April, all running through October.
- Common pollen allergens come from:
  - Trees such as alder, ash, birch, box elder, cypress, elm, hickory, maple, mulberry, oak, poplar, sycamore, walnut and western red cedar.

- Grasses such as Bermuda, blue grasses, orchard, meadow fescue, rye, sour dock, sweet vernal and timothy.
- Weeds such as burning bush, cockleweed, ragweed, pigweed, Russian thistle, sagebrush and tumbleweed.

#### Molds

- Mold spores cause just as much allergic discomfort as pollen.
- The most common and allergenic molds are *Alternaria*, *Cladosporium*, *Aspergillus* and *Penicillium*.
- Molds can be found both indoors and outdoors.
- Outdoor molds are active from spring until the first frost and thrive in damp conditions such as rotting wood, leaf piles and compost bins.

### **Diagnosing Allergies**

- A simple way to see if you have seasonal allergic rhinitis is to correlate your symptoms with the local pollen and mold counts. Check the pollen count at [www.aaaai.org/nab](http://www.aaaai.org/nab) or [www.pollen.com](http://www.pollen.com).
- If you have perennial allergic rhinitis, an allergist may suggest the following:
  - Blood test – an allergist draws a blood sample and tests it for antibodies to certain allergens such as ragweed. A high level of antibody indicates a reaction to that allergen. A blood test is usually used in addition to skin testing.
  - Skin tests – during a skin test an allergist pricks the skin on the inside of your arm or on your back with a needle coated in a suspected allergen, or injects it under the skin. If an itchy, red and swollen skin reaction occurs within 10 to 15 minutes, that allergen is most likely the cause of your allergic rhinitis. Histamine is the main substance causing the allergic response so do not take any antihistamines for several days before the test.

### **Preventing Allergic Rhinitis**

- It may sound simple, but avoid potential allergens if at all possible.
- Stay indoors when pollen counts are high, especially on dry, windy days between 5am and 10am.
- Pollen is counted after it settles on the ground and therefore reflects conditions 24 hours earlier, so always keep that in mind.

### **Treating Allergic Rhinitis**

#### Antihistamines

- Also called H1 antagonists, antihistamines block the major cause of allergic rhinitis symptoms.
- Many are available over the counter, such as Benadryl, with newer generation antihistamines now available that will not make you drowsy, such as Claritin, Allegra and Zyrtec.
- Antihistamines work well for sneezing, runny nose and itchy, watery eyes.

#### Decongestants

- Available in oral and nasal-spray forms, decongestants work on the nervous system to narrow blood vessels, helping to dry up secretions and clear congestion.
- Decongestants include Actifed and Sudafed; they are sometimes combined with painkillers, such as Advil Cold and Sinus as well as with antihistamines, such as Dimetapp.
- They can cause dry mouth, insomnia, increased blood pressure and more, and should not be used for more than a few days.

#### Nasal corticosteroids

- As the most effective treatment for allergic rhinitis, these drugs are anti-inflammatory nasal sprays.
- They “turn off” the immune reaction in the nasal passages and provide long-term relief.
- Nasal corticosteroids include Flonase and Nasonex.
- They can irritate the nasal membranes but do not have the negative side effects associated with other types of steroids.

#### Antileukotrienes

- Oral drugs that block the effects of leukotrienes, which are chemicals that cause inflammation.
- Used as an alternative to antihistamines and include Singulair.

#### Mast cell stabilizers

- Used to reduce swelling and secretions by interfering with the release of certain chemicals.
- Very safe but not as effective as nasal corticosteroids.
- Include Nasalcrom and Alomide.

#### Immunotherapy

- Better known as allergy shots, this involves injecting an allergen under the skin in small and increasing amounts every week for several months, then monthly for three to five years.
- Immunotherapy aims to accustom the immune system to the substance so it does not provoke an allergic reaction.

### **Alternative Therapies**

#### Acupuncture

- This is becoming a widely accepted and common treatment for allergic rhinitis.
- Allergy-related immune cells are less active after acupuncture because this treatment dampens the body's reaction and prompts the brain to release pain-reducing endorphins and chemicals that control blood flow and relieve congestion.
- Relief from nasal allergies can occur after just one treatment but several sessions will allow for optimal results.
- Acupuncture should be used in conjunction with traditional medicines, not as a replacement.

## Butterbur

- This herbal supplement comes from a flowering shrub that has been reported to have the same allergy-fighting effect as Allegra and Zyrtec.
- It works by blocking the histamines that cause allergic reactions.
- 50 milligrams twice a day is the recommended dosage.

## Flavonoids

- Flavonoids are plant chemicals that can reduce the inflammation that causes sinus pain and congestion.
- They are found in grape seed extract and quercetin, another flavonoid, is found in apples, bananas and onions, as well as in supplement form.

## Wellness Resources

*Harvard Women's Health Watch*, April 2005

*Health*, April 2005

*Self Healing*, April 2005

American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, [www.aaaai.org](http://www.aaaai.org)

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