**Natural Ways to Reduce Seasonal Allergies**

**By Dr. Ramona Warren**

Springtime in Georgia is truly beautiful.  From the birds singing to the spectacular blooms of the flowers and trees, everything is coming alive once again.  But with this awakening of nature, many people also experience the “awakening” of seasonal allergies resulting from high levels of pollen in the air. One of the colors we become so familiar with is the neon yellow pine pollen, which is so thick you can often see clouds of it hanging in the air.  Many people feel they can only enjoy spring from inside their homes due to allergic reactions. So, what are allergies and is there anything we can do to prevent them so we can enjoy this time of year without suffering?

An allergy is defined as an abnormally high sensitivity to a substance that is not typically harmful. An allergy is basically an indication that something is out of balance in your body causing it to overreact with an immune response.  The result can be itchy or watery eyes, runny nose, sneezing, eczema, abdominal pain or bloating to name a few. Some common causes of allergies are pollens, certain foods, stress, dust mites, pet dander and air pollution. Not everyone suffers with allergies, however they are becoming more and more common.

In recent years there has been a significant increase in allergies and asthma, especially in children. The amount of people suffering with allergies in North America has gone from only 10 percent in 1980 to 30 percent today. According to the Allergy and Asthma Foundation of America, 1 in 5 people now suffer from allergies. The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology estimates the annual cost of allergies to the health care system and businesses in the U.S. to be $7.9 BILLION.

Why are we experiencing this dramatic increase in allergies? The simple answer is that most allergy sufferers‘ immune systems are not as strong or efficient as they once were. Over 70 percent of your immune system is in your intestinal tract, and it is common to find an imbalance in the bacteria of the gut resulting from the use of medications, especially antibiotics. One study from the University of Marcos in 2010 found that children given antibiotics in their first year of life had a 66 percent increased risk for developing allergies.

Another cause of increased allergies is inflammation, especially in the gut. Many of the foods commonly consumed by Americans are filled with chemicals and trans fats.  In addition, the antibiotics and hormones found in many of the meats we consume also cause the body to become inflamed. Chronic inflammation can cause the body to become over-reactive and hypersensitive, while also causing a decrease in healthy gut flora.

Simple things you can do to help reduce allergies naturally are:

*        Improve your immune system by eating good quality foods consisting of lots of vegetables, some fruit and some lean meats.
*        Eat garlic.  Garlic is a natural antibiotic and helps to fight off viruses, infections and allergies. Using real cloves of garlic in your foods is more effective than taking it in supplement form and can offer a powerful boost to the immune system.
*        Increase your Vitamin D levels to help improve immune response. The optimal range for Vitamin D levels in our blood is between 45 and 100 ng/ml. Vitamin D is a modulator for the immune system and decreased levels of Vitamin D have been linked to autoimmune conditions.
*        When possible, reach for natural antihistamines and decongestants. There are several whole food supplements available that can help eliminate histamines, support liver function and loosen mucus without the side effects of most allergy medications.  Supplements that we use in our office with great success include Allerplex, Antronex and Fen-Gre.
*        Use lemons and limes to help improve your immune system and reduce allergies. Both fruits have high levels of Vitamin C.  Drinking lemon/lime water also helps your body get rid of toxins.
*        Use a HEPA filtration system to help keep allergen levels down inside your home. Also, change your air conditioner filters frequently during the pollen season.
*        When in your car, keep the ventilation system on re-circulate.

It is possible to reduce allergies naturally by taking a few simple steps toward strengthening the immune system and limiting overall exposure to environmental allergens.  Taking these steps can allow allergy sufferers to move beyond merely “surviving” this time of year, and bring them to a point where they can thrive and enjoy all spring has to offer.