

Local

# Allergy season is nothing to sneeze at

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METRO CREATIVE SERVICES

As the warm weather approaches, allergy sufferers are gearing up for the allergy season.

Winnipeg weather is warming up. It's time to get that spring in your step. It's also a time when many Manitobans begin to experience sneezing, runny noses and red, itchy, watery eyes. That's because there's something they are allergic to — and I'm not talking about winter or tax season. Instead, it's an issue that affects more than 500 million people worldwide: environmental allergies.

Fortunately, there are a number of things we can do about allergies, and they're a lot easier than opening an offshore account or moving to Belize.

### Identify the signs

If you or a loved one (or the person sniffing at the next cubicle) are experiencing bags under the eyes, dark under-eye circles, a crease in the nose, or are prone to mouth-breathing, it may be time to admit allergies exist. Since they can affect your sleep, energy and enjoyment of the most-anticipated Winnipeg season of the year, they are worth treating as soon as possible.

### Reduce your exposure

Key environmental allergens range from ragweed pollen to dust and moulds. Although it can be hard to avoid these, simple tips can help lessen your body's response. Start by monitoring weather reports on pollen counts, which are usually highest on sunny, windy days. By limiting outdoor exposure and keeping your windows closed when at home or in the car, you can reduce your exposure at the worst times. After you return from being out and about, consider having a shower and washing your hair immediately, and especially before bed. On hot days -- I'm sure they'll be here soon -- keep air-conditioning on the indoor cycle. One little known tip involves a beverage. Are you a tea drinker with a ragweed allergy? If so, I'd suggest you avoid chamomile tea, which is a relative of ragweed and can cause throat discomfort and exacerbate your symptoms.

### Choose the right treatment

The best treatment for you should be individualized. Antihistamines are a natural first-line agent for mild allergic rhinitis, or hay fever, because they counter the histamines produced by your body after exposure to allergens. They work best if used for prevention, not only treatment. If you tend to succumb to allergy symptoms at a certain time of year, your health-care practitioner may advise you to start taking an antihistamine two weeks before that. There are two classes of histamines, first and second generation. The second generation, such as cetirizine, loratidine and desloratidine, are the preferred option as they last longer and are less likely to cause dry mouth, constipation and drowsiness (or the paradoxical hyperactivity we often hear about in children). Depending on the severity, prescription medications such as intra-nasal corticosteroids or those that target other immune mediators such as sodium cromoglycate or montelukast may be best-suited to your needs.

### Support naturally with quercetin

Evidence on alternative therapies suggests a number of options may be worth considering. Among my favourites is quercetin, which has been shown to inhibit the release of histamine, and is also a potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory. This ingredient is particularly helpful for those with asthma as well, and is found in apples and red onions. Another option backed by science is butterbur, which has its own immune modulating activity. Careful guidance from your clinician is needed to ascertain the safest dose of its extract, petasin, usually eight mg up to four times daily.

### Don't overuse medications

Saline nasal sprays contain salt water, which is generally safe for routine use. Be advised, however, that decongestant nasal sprays containing phenylephrin or oxy- or xylometazoline can worsen congestion if used for more than three to five days. This rebound congestion can cause permanent overgrowth of nasal tissue over the long term, leading to chronic sinus inflammation.

For an allergy-sufferer, the impact of allergies on quality of life is nothing to sneeze at. By using a personalized and proactive approach to treatment, you'll be soaring through spring.

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