

# Springtime Supplement

## To Treat Your Allergies

“Different people have allergic reactions to different substances,” notes Dr. Gurdev (Dave) Judge of the Allergy, Asthma & Sinus Center in Cary, “but few among us are free of some type of allergic reaction to *something*—air, dust, mold, food, mites, dander—there are endless choices.” He also has offices in North Raleigh and Wake Forest.

“Reaction to what we call allergens—substances that cause an allergic reaction in some people under certain conditions—lurks within millions of us, simply waiting for the right set of circumstances to bring on distress ranging from mild and annoying to severe and life-threatening.”

The heat of summer, he notes, “is particularly difficult for those with the allergic condition we call asthma—and in this area, the period of spring through late summer is most severe, when danger is literally in the air.”

“Grass pollen ranks at the top of the list as one of the most pervasive summertime allergies,” the doctor notes. “And actually you don’t have to be near grass to suffer the consequences of an allergic reaction; grass pollen can travel 20 to 30 miles by air.”

Grass pollen, like all allergens, affects the immune system of those who are sensitive to it. The body reacts to the pollen as if it was an enemy—and releases “ammunition” called histamine in its own defense. “Histamine triggers inflammation of the nasal tract,” explains Dr. Judge, “which in turn triggers sneezing, tears, and runny noses. Symptoms often also include sore throats, ear infections, coughs, and headaches.”

“Mold spores are another vexing seasonal allergen because of the humidity of our summer months. Airborne mold spores can cause trouble indoors and out, and rainy weather simply exacerbates the problem.”

Dr. Judge, who is both an allergist-immunologist and a pediatrician, notes that many allergy sufferers manage reasonably well with antihistamines and steroid medications. “Some of the latest medications effectively block the release of the chemicals that trigger allergic reactions,” he notes.

“For others, allergen immunotherapy often makes life much easier. Immunotherapy is the injection of small amounts of molds and pollens—or almost any other substance—that might trigger an allergic reaction. The amount of the substance injected increases over time, to an optimal level in terms of control of the allergic reaction, and the therapy continues as long as needed. At its conclusion, many patients are completely relieved of their reaction to the offending allergen.”

### FOOD ALLERGIES

Summer is also a prime time for food allergies, Dr. Judge notes. “People are allergic to a variety of foods. Hundreds of foods have been documented in the scientific literature as causing allergic reactions. The most common offenders are milk, eggs, soy, wheat, peanuts, shellfish, fruits, and tree nuts.”

“Consistently, each summer allergic reactions to shellfish increase, sometimes with frightening consequences. Typically, with an allergic reaction to shellfish the sufferer’s mouth

tightens and their skin itches. They may break out in hives. Their lips swell and, more seriously, they may have trouble breathing.

“It’s not necessary to eat shellfish to have this type of allergic reaction. Sometimes just the smell of shellfish cooking can be the trigger. I advise people who have a severe allergic reaction to food to take epinephrine—Benadryl—immediately and get to the nearest hospital emergency room as soon as possible. We can test a great variety of foods as allergens in a matter of minutes.”

### LITTLE INSECTS, BIG TROUBLE

Just as potentially dangerous as food allergies are allergic reactions to insect bites—especially to the bites of honeybees, yellow jackets, hornets, and wasps. “Most of us spend a great deal of time outdoors from early spring to late fall, and it’s always wise to use insect repellent when we go out for any length of time. People who are known to have an allergic reaction to insect bites must take special precautions. In addition to insect repellent, I advise my patients to keep Benadryl on hand to counter the effects of an insect bite.”

“While one person can tolerate a bee sting with a bit of pain, others may experience allergic reactions that run from uncomfortable itching and hives to swelling of the lips and difficulty breathing. A cold compress on the site of the bite, along with Benadryl, is a good idea.”

When hiking this summer, Dr. Judge warns us all to be on the lookout for fire ants, which have become more prevalent in our area. “Their stings can be extremely painful if you’re not allergic to them, and can cause more harm if you are.”



Skin testing quickly reveals the nature of the allergy problem for Dr. Judge’s patient.

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### EYE ALLERGIES

“Eyes that itch, are red, tearing or burning may be the result of allergic conjunctivitis, a condition that affects millions of Americans,” Dr. Judge points out.

“Just like hay fever and skin rashes, eye allergies develop when the body’s immune system becomes sensitized and over-reacts to something that is ordinarily harmless. An allergic reaction can occur whenever that ‘something’ comes into contact with your eyes.”

“The most common allergens causing allergic conjunctivitis are, again, outdoor airborne allergens such as grass, tree, and weed pollens. Pet hair or dander, dust mites and molds are the most common indoor allergens.”

“As is true of all allergic conditions, avoidance of the trigger is the number one form of treatment. There are eye drops and oral medications that are effective in treating eye allergies, and immunotherapy, when indicated, is another option for gaining relief.”

### ALLERGIC TO WHAT?

It is a very good idea, and a simple process, to find the cause of an allergic reaction, says Dr. Judge. “The skin testing that we do is the easiest, quickest, most sensitive, and generally least expensive way of making the diagnosis (*see photo*). It’s possible to test for a great array of possible causes of an allergic condition, and to know the results of that testing within minutes.” Less frequently, Dr. Judge will use a special blood test for allergens.

Following testing, Dr. Judge works with his patient to develop an individualized treatment plan that most often includes three features: avoidance of known allergens whenever possible; appropriate medications as necessary, and, when indicated, immunotherapy (“allergy shots”) over a period of time. *h&h*

**For more information about diagnostic and treatment options for allergies, asthma, and sinus conditions, contact:**

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