

An Ayurvedic Perspective on Allergies

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Allergies are caused and prevented by the body's ability to accept or reject ingested substances. The Sanskrit word Satmya means tolerance, describing that to which the body is accustomed. Asatmya is intolerance, describing that to which the body is unaccustomed. There are several causative factors that determine the type and severity of a reaction to an allergen in the body. Understanding each of these components will lead to a more comprehensive approach to the treatment of allergies with respect to the natural intelligence of the body.

Agni: Digestive fire

The state of agni determines your body's ability to 'digest' what it experiences. Agni protects our immunity and nourishes the body. If agni is low, unmetabolized toxins known as ama can form in the body. If the body is invaded by an antigen, then the subtle energies created by agni mobilize the immune response to neutralize the toxin. If there is strong agni throughout the body an allergy is virtually impossible.

Ama: Toxins

Toxins or ama can form and accumulate in the body impairing its ability to neutralize foreign substances. One main cause of ama is when the body is not able to properly digest food. Undigested food stuff is then stored in the tissues as toxic material. Poor elimination also contributes to ama accumulation in the body. Mental toxins form from being unable to process life's experiences. This results in unresolved emotions and mental stagnation. Ama causes blockages within the body, making it difficult for the immune system to respond effectively.

Prakriti: Constitutional tendencies

The individual constitution or prakriti will determine how the response to ama manifests. The prakriti is a unique combination of the doshas, vata, pitta and kapha, and exhibits differently in each body. The idiosyncrasies will depend on where the ama is being stored and which dosha is predominant.

Disease is merely an expression of a potential tendency and our prakriti expresses that inherent nature.

Vikriti: Imbalanced tendencies

A further factor involved in the manifestation of allergies is the current state of imbalance circulating within the tissues. How much excessive vata, pitta or kapha within the body-mind will also influence the response. Also, allergens can exhibit qualities that are specific to each dosha.

If kapha is balanced then exposure to a kapha allergen will be minimal. If kapha is high then exposure to a kapha type allergen may be excessive.

Allergen

The type of allergen will also influence the response; there are vata, pitta and kapha types of allergens. The quantity of that allergen is also critical in determining the response to it. If there is a large volume of allergen it will overpower even the strongest agni.

Common Allergens:

- pollen
- house dust
- house mites
- air pollution
- industrial chemicals
- foods
- drugs
- animal dander
- latex
- plants (poison ivy, oak, nettle rash)
- dyes
- metals (nickel)
- cosmetics

Dosha symptoms:

Vata

Vata-type allergy symptoms can lead to sudden sneezing and wheezing. There can be a narrowing of the bronchial passages upon exposure to an allergen such as dust or pollen.

Cause: Vata aggravating diet and lifestyle, nightshades, bitter foods, fear **Pre-symptom signs:** feeling sensitive to cold, hot and cold, shivering, frail, poor appetite, gas, bloating, muscular tension, insomnia, anxiety, increased fear and anxiety

Symptoms: Headaches, gas, bloating, constipation, burping, food intolerances, wheezing, dry cough

Treatment: A warm and unctuous treatment such as abhyanga, oil massage with warm sesame oil. Include activities that are calming to the nerves. Diet should be vata-reducing, warm and nourishing. Include the tastes of sweet and pungent in the diet or herbal regime.

Herbal formula: Take Triphala Guggulu, Trikatu and Stress Ease tablets with ginger tea.

Pitta

Pitta allergies are generally due to a person with high pitta coming into physical contact with certain allergens, such as chemicals, poisonous plants or synthetic fibers. These reactions are

typically expressed through the skin.

Cause: Pitta aggravating diet and lifestyle, too much sun, insect bites, contact with chemicals

Pre-symptom signs: Aversion to heat, thirst, feeling hot, gnawing hunger

Symptoms: Rashes, redness, skin inflammation, itching, vomiting, severe reactions, headaches

Treatment: Follow a pitta-pacifying diet that is cooling, cleansing and clearing. Include the tastes of sweet and bitter in the diet or herbal regime.

Herbal formula: Take Liver Formula with aloe or fresh cilantro juice.

Kapha

Kapha allergies are generally expressed as respiratory congestion, cold and cough. They are most aggravated in the Spring when pollen counts are high. The allergens enter through the nasal passage and irritate the mucus membrane.

Cause: Kapha aggravating lifestyle, wet weather, low agni, high ama

Pre-symptom signs: Feeling tired, heaviness, stagnant, slow digestion

Symptoms: Runny nose, nasal congestion, sneezing, asthma, edema

Treatment: A hot and drying treatment, such as a dry sauna. Therapy should aim to lighten and decongest the body. Follow a kapha-pacifying diet including the tastes of pungent and bitter. Engage in rigorous exercise regularly.

Herbal formula: Take Trikatu and Lung Formula tablets with hot honey water.

General treatment:

- Remove the cause. Avoid the allergens and modify the environment to limit or block exposure. For allergens which cannot be avoided, lubricate the nasal passages with nasya oil. This forms a protective layer and prevents direct contact with the mucous membrane.
- Strengthen agni and intestinal integrity. Eat only when you are hungry. Be wise about food combinations.
- Clear ama and reduce toxic overload. Use triphala to gently help cleanse the body. Take 1/2 to 1 teaspoon (or 1-2 tablets) of triphala before bedtime.
- Purify the body of any excessive dosha accumulation. Eat fresh, easy to digest meals according to your prakriti.
- Finally, rejuvenate the whole system. Begin to build and tonify the body. Chyavanprash or Ashwaghandha can be taken daily to replenish and energize the body.

Yoga: Yoga postures can help to purify the body and open the channels that help the body to function optimally. Vata and Kapha can both benefit from practicing Sun Salutations. This series is warming and helps to bring more movement into the body. Pitta can practice cooling forward bends or Moon Salutations to bring balance to the system.

Breathing Exercises: Pranayama or breathing exercises are very effective for allergies involving the respiratory system such as hayfever, sneezing or wheezing. Gentle ujjayi pranayama, or ocean sounding breath, is both calming and strengthening to the immune system. Sitting in a comfortable position, gently constrict the glottis at the back of the throat by moving the back of the tongue up towards the palate. Your breathing should sound like a light snoring. Continue breathing through the nostrils, deep into the abdomen, for several rounds.

Meditation: Meditate for relaxation and stress reduction. Sit quietly, firmly rooted, focusing on the crown of your head and your breath. Inhalation is bringing prana or life into the body. Expiration is breathing out anything that does not serve you in this moment. Practicing meditation, even for just 5 minutes, can help to bring relaxation into the body and lower stress hormones which typically play a role in allergic reactions. Ultimately, this practice brings you in line with cosmic or universal consciousness offering expansive peace and joy.

Charaka

All the world seeks food. It is the life source of all beings. Clarity, longevity, intelligence, happiness, contentment, strength and knowledge are all rooted in food.