Proactive Strategies to Reduce Allergic Rhinitis Symptoms

Chris D. Meletis, ND (with permission from cpmedical.net, access pin: 587556)

Millions of people suffer year around from environmental allergens, yet there is a definitive surge during the spring and summer seasons. According to the scientific research, there has been a strong and growing prevalence of allergic rhinitis over the last couple of decades. I can also attest to this increased prevalence by the number of patients I see with this problem in clinical practice. The number of people who suffer from seasonal allergies also is reflected in the billion-dollar industry of prescription and over the counter drugs to control allergic symptoms.

There are some interesting observations that have been documented in the medical literature relative to risk of allergic rhinitis that presents with allergy induced inflamed runny or stuffy, itchy nose and sneezing. Research has indicated that individuals who live in higher pollution regions, have a family history of allergies, who were fed formula or food early in infancy, who were born during peak allergy season and who received antibiotics at an early age have an increased risk of developing seasonal allergies (Table 1).

Proactive Stance

It is important to proactively tackle allergic symptoms before the avalanche of symptoms cascades throughout the mucous membranes including the eyes, nose, throat and sinuses. Individuals that suffer from environmental allergens also know all too well that the risk for developing secondary health concerns is all too real and include: sinusitis and sinus infections, middle ear infections and fluid accumulation, bronchitis and asthma.

Clinically there are four steps that I implement with all my patients with allergic rhinitis.

1. Minimize exposures
2. Control histamine levels naturally
3. Enhance mucous membrane resistance
4. Lessen inflammation

Minimize Exposures

The microscopic pollen released by trees, grasses and weeds or molds and mildews and animal dander are common culprits for those of us who are nasally challenged.

Minimizing exposure is critical—total burden is the real factor. Many people can get away with a quick passing exposure for a few moments, yet anything other than one’s personal threshold will start a
cascade of events that can have long-lasting consequences for hours, days and sometimes weeks. So try to incorporate the following simple ways to help keep exposure to a minimum.

- Keep your home’s doors and windows closed.
- Use the air conditioner rather than opening a window.
- Limit outdoor activity, particularly in the morning (5 AM to 10 AM) and mid-evening.
- Keep track of pollen counts in your area and don’t exercise outside during your allergen peak.
- Don’t go outside more than necessary on windy days.
- Keep your car windows up and sunroof closed and keep air on re-circulate while driving.
- Shower prior to going to bed including your hair, because pollen will collect on you throughout the day.
- Change your clothes after being outside, otherwise you will contaminate your inner sanctum.
- Controlling Histamine Levels Naturally

What all allergies have in common is the antigen (allergen) stimulation of two related cell types: mast cells and basophils. Mast cells line the blood vessels in the connective tissue of the lungs, inner eyelids, gut, ear, nose, throat and skin. Basophils are a type of white blood cell. Both mast cells and basophils are full of granules of histamine and other allergic chemical mediators. When allergen/antigens in the blood contact mast cells or basophils in sufficient numbers, a burst of histamine and other allergic mediators is released into the bloodstream. It is the histamine and other allergic mediators that trigger the misery of allergic reaction: runny, itchy nose and sneezing, watery, itchy red eyes, tickling and itching in ears, nose and throat, skin rash, headache, asthma, etc.

A number of natural substances that can help ameliorate this process are of interest to allergy sufferers. Quercetin is a powerful inhibitor of antigen-stimulated histamine release from basophils and mast cells, even at low levels (5-50 micromoles, or 1.51-15.1 mcg/ml).3-4 Unlike most anti-allergy substances, quercetin is highly effective at inhibiting histamine release during both the first and second stage of basophil histamine release.5-6

The anti-inflammatory effects of quercetin might be due to inhibition of the production and activity of leukotrienes and prostaglandins, and inhibition of histamine release by basophils and mast cells.7 Preliminary evidence suggests that quercetin inhibits antigen-stimulated histamine release from mast cells of patients with allergic rhinitis.8

Enhance Mucous Membrane Resistance

The first and most important way to protect your mucous membranes from irritation other than avoidance to unnecessary exposure is to maintain proper hydration. This can be as simple as drinking at least a minimum of 64 ounces of clear fluids per day and limiting caffeine intake. Moist membranes are more resilient and less likely to become irritated. Additionally, if you have sufficient hydration, a quick flow of mucus from the nasal passages or tearing of the eyes can naturally rid the body of the burdensome exposure more efficiently opposed to allowing it to cozy up to your mucous membranes for long term mast and basophil stimulation.

The next important step in protecting your mucous membranes is to ensure that you are immunocompetent to the best of your individual capacity. This is where EpiCor® can play a significant role, as it has been shown to increase natural killer cells, phagocytosis, enhance your CD4/CD8 ratio and
most importantly for this conversation enhance your slgA. It is this immune coating of your mucous membranes that protect against foreign substances and helps prevent the spread of infection that can readily occur with ongoing irritation and longstanding presence of mucus. As I share with my patients, the human body is moist and warm, and with excess mucus, we become a “human petri dish,” which serves as the host of opportunistic infections.

The immune properties of EpiCor have also been shown to help directly with allergies. In a double-blind, placebo-controlled trial, subjects were given either EpiCor (1,000 mg) or placebo for 5 weeks. At the end of 5 weeks, the salivary slgA increased while the serum IgE decreased. Though not reaching full statistical significance due to the nature of this pilot trial, this was a strong trend. These results helped confirm the findings of a previous trial supporting the efficacy of EpiCor. On the other hand, the decreased serum IgE suggests the important immune balancing effects of this substance.

Since this trial was conducted in the spring when allergies are a problem for many people, one would expect serum IgE to increase, since this immune parameter is associated with allergies. This was seen in the controls. However, in the EpiCor group, the levels stayed nearly at baseline, giving laboratory confirmation of the subjects reporting fewer allergy problems than usual. This was also reflected in a standardized questionnaire showing fewer health complaints with the EpiCor group. It was also observed that cytokine profiles were shifting in the EpiCor group—from Th1 (pro-inflammatory) to Th2 (pro-adaptive) and vice versa—again demonstrating the immune balancing properties of EpiCor.9

A study published in the journal Urologic Nursing confirms EpiCor’s immune-enhancing effects. In the new randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical trial, researchers studied 116 people recently vaccinated against the flu. Subjects received either daily supplements of EpiCor (500 mg) or a placebo. The University of Michigan scientists collected data on the subjects at the study’s start and after six and 12 weeks.

The researchers found that the subjects given EpiCor experienced significantly fewer cold and flu symptoms and significantly shorter duration of symptoms, compared to subjects taking the placebo. Among the 116 study participants, those who did have symptoms experienced a reduction in the duration of symptoms by 14 percent after taking EpiCor. The overall occurrence of cold and flu symptoms was reduced by 21 percent in the EpiCor group.10

Lessen Inflammation

It is essential to control inflammation when it comes to allergic response, to avoid the “itis” factor. Whether it is rhinitis, sinusitis, pharyngitis from post nasal drip, or bronchitis, the “itis” designates inflammation of the particular body part. Inflammation furthers the irritation of the tissues and in the case of the airway, it also further narrows it, making it hard to breathe and increasing congestion.

The use of bromelain has demonstrated its clinical utility over the years to help ameliorate inflammatory symptoms. When taken on an empty stomach approximately 40 percent of the bromelain is absorbed into the bloodstream intact.11 Bromelain stimulates the production and release of anti-inflammatory prostaglandins (PGs), while simultaneously reducing the production and release of proinflammatory PGs.12
Vitamin C is a natural antihistamine. It both prevents histamine release and increases the detoxification of histamine. A study found that taking 2,000 mg of vitamin C daily lowered blood histamine levels 38 percent in healthy adults in just one week. People with low levels of plasma vitamin C seem to have higher levels of histamine, so ongoing use of vitamin C to achieve sustained levels clinically appears to optimize the overall benefits.13

Conclusion

It is absolutely essential to become proactive at the first sign of allergic symptoms. In an ideal world, one will have the correct supplements on hand, so that a strong offense to protect the body’s mucous membranes can begin before the full speed of the allergic cascade is underway. Some simple approaches include consuming a formula with the synergistic ingredients of quercetin, bromelain and vitamin C, optimizing immune health with EpiCor, and minimizing exposure to allergens, a strategy that can strengthen the health of allergy sufferers.

References: