



Allergy Relief

Don't let autumn's molds and spores get you down **by Julie Mehta**

Awalk among the wildflowers. A hike in the woods. A drive through the countryside ablaze with fall colors. For millions of people, these simple pleasures too often end in itchy eyes, stuffy noses and sneezing.

Much more than a simple annoyance, seasonal allergies, or hay fever, can cause lethargy, irritability and general misery. The recently released Allergies in America survey, a sampling of 2500 nasal allergy sufferers, reported that four out of five fre-

quently or sometimes felt tired during allergy season. More than a third of those surveyed said they felt depressed or blue.

But allergy sufferers don't need to dread the warmer months or shut themselves inside until the pollens and mold spores

have cleared the air. With planning and precautions, they too can embrace nature's glories.

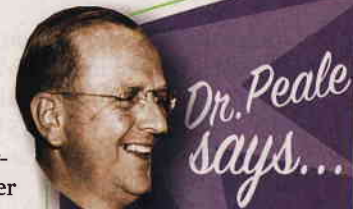
Allergic reactions happen when the body's immune system overreacts to a substance that is normally considered safe. For victims of hay fever, the most common symptom is nasal congestion. Others include runny nose, sinus pain and pressure, and poor sleep. "The nasal congestion impairs breathing—it's like putting a clip on the nose," says Timothy Craig, M.D., a professor of medicine and pediatrics at Penn State University specializing in allergies. "As sleep gets more impaired, that leads to shorter temper, lower self-esteem and increased absenteeism." In fact, more than half of the employed respondents in the Allergies in America study reported missing work or impaired work performance as a result of allergies.

No one knows exactly why people develop allergies or the reason they

are becoming more common. Current statistics show that between 15 and 25 percent of Americans suffer from seasonal allergies.

The triggers vary depending on the region and season. Generally, tree pollen is prevalent in spring, grass pollen in summer and weed pollen in fall. Mold is a problem all year long in the South and on the West Coast. "In areas with four obvious seasons, most people suffer from ragweed in late summer," says Brian A. Smart, M.D., an allergist at DuPage Medical Group in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. "For areas with milder seasonal variations such as the Pacific Northwest, which hasn't got ragweed, there's a more severe tree pollen season that starts in February. In southwestern areas, the more serious problem is with weeds such as sagebrush."

The key to allergies is avoidance. An allergist can do skin or blood tests



ENJOY NATURE!

- 1 Next time you go for a walk, take a deep breath of fresh air. Then give yourself a pep talk as you walk. It will fill you with enthusiasm that never runs down.
- 2 To get in sync with the world around you, be still and listen. Pay attention to the sound of the wind in the trees and the murmur of insects. You will discover in these sounds a divinely-regulated tempo. Follow that and you'll find your rhythm.
- 3 Take time to appreciate the wonders of nature—like the stars twinkling in the sky and the crunch of leaves under your feet on an autumn night. They'll make your heart sing!

You've heard the phrase "the power of positive thinking." Dr. Norman Vincent Peale was the inspiration behind it and the author of the world-wide best-seller of the same name.

to diagnose the things you're allergic to. To minimize your exposure to them:

◎ Keep the windows closed. Use a dehumidifier or air conditioning to keep the air inside your home cool and clean.

◎ Watch local weather reports or check aaai.org/nab/index.cfm to find out pollen and mold levels in your area. Pollen counts will generally be higher on hot, dry, windy days than

on cloudy or rainy days.

◎ Try to avoid going outside in the early morning (5 to 10 am), when pollens are being emitted.

◎ Shower and wash your hair at night to get rid of the pollens you've picked up during the day.

◎ Close your car windows. This helps keep out those airborne allergens.

◎ Wear a mask when mowing the lawn or raking leaves. Better yet, get someone else to do it!

Sure, complete avoidance of seasonal allergens is difficult. Medications such as antihistamines, decongestants and steroid nasal sprays can provide safe, much-needed relief. It may take some trial and error to find the one that's best for you. For severe cases, the doctor may suggest allergy shots.

Don't suffer in silence. Take your allergies seriously and control them—so they don't control you.

Watch What You Eat

SEASONAL ALLERGY SUFFERERS only need to worry about their allergies certain times of the year. People with food allergies have to be constantly on their guard. Food allergies have doubled in the last decade. Currently, some 12 million Americans have a food allergy; among adults, shellfish, fish, peanuts, and tree nuts are the most common offenders. "In this country, food allergy results in thirty thousand emergency room visits a year," says Anne Munoz-Furlong, founder of the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network (foodallergy.org).

For those with food allergies, strict avoidance is the only option. Any exposure could result in a reaction, ranging from tingling lips to itching skin to anaphylaxis, a

systemic response that may bring on vomiting, diarrhea and difficulty breathing. Make sure to see a doctor even if you've only had mild reactions because they may be further sensitizing your system and paving the way for a severe one.

Still, food allergies don't have to mean limiting your life. Just be careful and plan ahead. Make family and friends aware of your allergy. Check ingredients every time you grocery shop because they can change without warning. "When in doubt," Munoz-Furlong stresses, "don't eat the food." She suggests that before you go on vacation, you "call the hotel and restaurants and tell them you need their guidance to pick safe foods.

Some people get a place with a kitchenette so they can cook their own meals."—JULIE MEHTA

