

Common Allergies Should Not Be Common

by, Jesse A. Stoff, MD, MDH, FAAFP

Posted in Creations Magazine August/September Issue of 2011

By definition, an allergic reaction is defined as a hyper-reactivity toward normally non-immunogenic substances. In English that means that, for any one of a number of reasons, your body is reacting abnormally against something that it shouldn't with an immunological response, usually because the immune system has sustained some damage.

This time of year many people are suffering with upper respiratory tract allergies with the usual; coughing, sneezing, runny nose, itchy eyes and the like. Just because it is a common problem for people to have, that doesn't make it normal nor does it mean that YOU have to be one of the sufferers. At least one out of every 5 Americans suffers from some form of allergies. Common causes of allergy symptoms vary by age group. Children tend to have more food allergies and adults more respiratory tract allergies and both groups get eczema pretty evenly. Of course children can and do get respiratory tract allergies, including asthma, which can be life threatening, but they often have food allergy issues under them and digestive problems under that which make them more reactive.

Anything that undermines your immune system can make allergies worse and predispose you to the development of new ones. The immune system's complexity rivals that of the central nervous system and is responsible for determining what is threatening us and then protecting us from it. In order for it to do its job it needs good biochemical support, via absorbed nutrients from our digestive tract, and then basically we need to get out of the way and let it do its job.

When my daughter, Summer, gets a small cut on her finger and applies a Band-Aid, she does so with the full expectation that when the Band-Aid is removed a couple of days later, the cut will have been "magically" healed. She is usually rewarded by her faith in her immune system's healing capacity.

On a macroscopic level, healing appears to us as a miracle or as magic because of all the little elements that go into the repair of the damaged tissue. The removal of foreign material and destruction of harmful bacteria all happens in a microscopic world that is not directly accessible to our unaided eye.

Left to its own devices, the body tends towards health. When someone doesn't heal well or keeps getting sick or develops new allergies the reason lies in one or more of the **five areas that affect the integrity of our immune system:**

The first of these is **nutrition**. Nutrition supplies the basic biochemical building blocks that provide the infrastructure for our immune system to function properly. Just eating a broad diet doesn't guarantee that you'll get what your immune system needs because there are issues of the quality of the food and the efficiency of the digestive system to be reckoned with.

Infection is the second area that affects the functioning of our immune system. Viruses that directly attack immune function like EBV, CMV and HIV will have long term consequences on our ability to protect ourselves from future infections. EBV and CMV are common. More than 96 percent of the population have been exposed to them at some point. Imbalances in the micro-organisms in our digestive tract will also have a profound affect on our immune system.

As a consequence of industrialization, toxins now abound throughout our environment. A casual perusal of <http://toxnet.nlm.nih.gov> will give you some small idea of how big and prevalent the problem is. That's why it is important to limit your exposure to toxins wherever you can such as choosing to eat as much organic food as possible and drinking plenty of pure water, fluoride not included.

Trauma is the next agent of immunological suppression. The only form of trauma that can directly hurt our immune system is that which comes from the exposure to radiation. This not only brings to mind Chernobyl, Three Mile Island and Fukushima but also commercial flight. When you are cruising at 35,000 feet, you are above much of the atmosphere that protects us from ionizing radiation. Studies have shown that air flight personnel have a higher incidence of severe and chronic diseases because of this.

The fifth horseman of immunological apocalypse is **stress**. The term stress was coined by Dr. Hans Selye more than 70 years ago. According to Selye, “disease is an attack on any particular aspect of your body or mind that creates a distressed physiology.” Stress is an individual’s non-specific response to any stimulus, conscious or unconscious, physical or physiological. It is such an integral component of our existence that Selye has stated that, “Complete freedom from stress is death.” There are two categories of stress: eustress (characterized by happiness and enjoyment) and distress (characterized by anguish, tension and worry). During distress the adrenal glands secrete the steroid hormone cortisol to excess, and without the normal cycling that usually occurs, thus suppressing immune function. In the course of “normal” life we all have elements of most of the issues that can adversely affect our immune system and thus predispose us to allergies. **Things that you can do to minimize this impact include**; eating a diet of predominantly organic foods, drinking 8 glasses of clean water per day and get good and adequate sleep. Beyond that, allergy testing can uncover triggers. A clinical nutritionist can further help you with appropriate supplement and nutritional support. Based on your history and physical findings, lab tests can determine the best way to proceed both by answering the question of why your immune system isn’t protecting you as it should and what medical disorders you have now that should be directly addressed. Together this integrated approach can help you to “live long and prosper”.