

Adios, allergies!

EIGHT WAYS TO GET THROUGH THE SNEEZE SEASON—SNIFFLE-FREE

CAN'T STOP SNEEZING? Blame sexism! Don't laugh—landscapers plant mostly male trees and shrubs because they don't drop messy seeds or fruit the way females do. But the boys continue to pump out pollen without enough mates around to attract and trap the tiny particles, so we humans become the lucky recipients. It's become such a big problem that at least five U.S. cities (including Phoenix and Las Vegas) now have laws that forbid the sale and planting of male shrubbery, says Tom Ogren, author of *Safe Sex in the Garden* (Ten Speed Press).

But lovelorn plants aren't the only reason you're sneezing: Many allergy-causing weeds and trees pollinate in the late summer and on into fall, flourishing from mid-August until the first frost. Achoo!

If you're feeling stuffy, make sure hay fever (aka seasonal allergies) is the culprit, not a cold. A clue that it's a cold: thick, yellowish mucus. "Itchy eyes, nose and throat are more common with allergies," says Mark O'Hollaren, M.D., director of the Allergy Clinic in Portland, Oregon. (And be aware that you could have your first attack at any age.) If it is allergies, a few simple strategies may clear your head.

Clean up your act Pollen, mold spores and other airborne nasties can settle on your hair and skin, so wash both frequently. (If you're especially sneezy after being outdoors, rinse off in the shower.) You can also hole up inside during peak pollen periods: early morning and evening. Shut the windows and turn on the air conditioner to help filter what you breathe.

Try a natural fix Pick up a neti pot, a small gadget that resembles Aladdin's lamp (look for one at pharmacies and health food stores), and fill it with lukewarm, lightly salted water. Cock your head to one side and slowly pour the water into the higher nostril; breathe through your mouth as the water travels up one side and out the other nostril. It's not exactly attractive. But even though nasal



irrigation may look like a gross grade school trick, allergists say it's one of the best ways to temporarily clear the nose of pollen particles. You can use the neti pot two or three times a day or as needed.

Spice it up Adding wasabi (horseradish) or cayenne pepper to your food can cause your nose to run, flushing out allergens. If your stomach can't stand the heat, taking a quick whiff of wasabi paste may do the same trick. (Just don't try this with pepper!)

Be picky about petals When buying cut flowers for an allergic friend (or your sniffling self), ask for doubles or formal doubles. Breeders created these hybrid versions to look fuller, and in the process they ended up with pollen-free flowers. Or pick trumpet-shaped blooms like tulips and daylilies, which store pollen deeply, so you're less likely to inhale it. You can also ask the florist to remove pollen on certain flowers; he'll just pop off the packets of pollen with his fingers.

Stick with it Acupuncture is often an effective treatment for allergies, though most doctors aren't. (Continued)

sure why. Acupuncturists believe the therapy bolsters the immune system. They advise getting 5 to 10 weekly sessions starting several weeks before the onset of the sneezy season; relief may come as early as the third visit and can last up to a year. To find a qualified acupuncturist, contact the American Academy of Medical Acupuncture at www.medicalacupuncture.org.

Reconsider your Rx

Most hay fever sufferers pop over-the-counter and prescription allergy pills like Claritin, Allegra and Zyrtec, even though studies consistently find prescription steroid nasal sprays such as Flonase, Nasacort AQ and Nasonex to be better at soothing symptoms. Singulair, a multi-purpose asthma pill, can also alleviate allergies. An upcoming option, Xolair, is set to receive FDA approval for allergic asthma; researchers plan to look into its effectiveness against seasonal allergies as well.

Roll up your sleeve If your symptoms are bad enough to interfere with exercise and other daily activities, ask your doctor if allergy shots could help ease your misery. The shots strengthen your immunity by

slowly exposing your body to the allergen. Getting the shots is a commitment, and it doesn't offer permanent protection: You'll need them weekly or biweekly for four to six months, followed by bimonthly jabs for three to five years, possibly indefinitely. But it may be worth it if your Kleenex consumption has deforested half of Canada.

Common
pollen
producer:
ragweed



Fight allergies with attitude

"Allergy sufferers are more likely to be depressed," says Richard Firshein, D.O., founder of the Firshein Center for Comprehensive Medicine in New York City. A recent study found that people with allergies were one and a half times more prone to depression than those who were symptom-free. Some experts think that there may be chemical causes to explain the connection, but it could also be that nonstop sneezing and sniffing simply get you down. Treating your allergy symptoms may improve your mood, which in turn can help you cope better the next time you feel a bout with allergies coming on. ■

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