

# Sick of Allergy?

Whenever discussing this problem, it is firstly important to define what an allergy is compared to the more common intolerance.

With an increasing incidence of both conditions, many people can become confused about their symptoms which can make the identification process of the cause or trigger that much more difficult.

In short, an allergy is an immune response to a range of things from certain foods, pollens, pets, synthetic chemicals to prescription drugs, the living environment and toiletries to name but a few.

The herbal approach is to initially identify the causative agent (referred to as allergen) and to offer comprehensive and practical advice on eliminating it or avoiding it as far as possible. The holistic aspect of treatment will examine the immune system (after all, allergy is very much an immune response) and making a thorough review of gut function.

Often, many patients who are prone to allergies have a leaky gut - this means that food substances (including some waste material) pass directly through the gut wall into the tissues and spaces within the gut cavity, rather than being absorbed into the bloodstream.

This has disastrous consequences for the health, not only because of possible toxic burden but also because the immune system can get to the point where it cannot cope.

Combined with poor digestive function, imbalance in the gut flora, stress and other illnesses can put a heavy strain on the body resulting in immune breakdown.

Firstly, cutting out trigger foods such as dairy and wheat for example can reduce the symptoms significantly as they are known allergens.

Preparing the ground for proper gut function is very important. Bitter herbs such as gentian or wormwood will improve digestive function as well as taking some probiotics (depending on the severity of the allergy) to boost gut flora. This will ensure that any toxic burden is reduced to a minimum because the gut will be able to fend off any invasion of potential allergens ingested from food.

Examining digestive patterns is also critical as this will determine possible causes in cases where the allergen has not yet been identified.

The next step is to address the immune function and boost this system which has probably become overburdened with the toxic triggers on a regular basis. Herbs such as echinacea, marigold or ginseng will all boost the immune system.

After this, the traditional allergy herbs such as nettle, eyebright, elderflowers, ephedra and chamomile will all address the various symptoms of allergy such as inflammation, watery and itch eyes and sneezing etc... and supplements such as quercetin and omega 3 essential fatty acids will replenish the system with the important nutrients.

Supplements of butterbur (petasites) has shown favourable results in trials but sadly, now removed from sale due to concerns over liver toxicity/damage. A herbalist should be able to make a comprehensive review of each case and work out an individual dietary plan with specific herbal treatments for the allergy in question.

## Hay fever

This is also called allergic rhinitis and much of the same treatment approaches apply as in allergies (see above). However, a consultation with a herbalist is strongly advised so that an individual treatment plan can be worked out and to identify which pollens are the culprits in each case.

### A Symptomatic Approach to Treatment

Sore throat, blocked nose, catarrh	Honey & lemon, oils of eucalyptus, menthol, peppermint and cajeput (inhalation), licorice
Sinus congestion	Inhalations of clove, menthol and eucalyptus oils
Headaches & migraines	Feverfew tablets, willow bark tablets
Earache, blocked ears or sinuses	Garlic oil, mullein, echinacea, goldenseal

### Specific Help for Allergic Rhinitis

Allergic reactions	Petasites or butterbur (no longer available for sale or use), echinacea, eyebright, chamomile, quercetin supplements
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## Natural & Herbal Approaches to Eczema

I have had numerous requests for information on natural approaches to eczema. This stems mainly from the fact that conventional approaches require often harsh treatments and drugs that are steroid based (such as hydrocortisone cream) and if it is particularly bad especially in children, many parents worry about-the long-term use of steroid based drugs over the years.

Although topical (applied externally), these drugs are absorbed into the body and often makes the skin thinner over time and may lead to systemic problems later on. Many people also don't realise that eczema requires a holistic approach to treatment and management that involves nutrition, herbal treatments (both internal and topical) as well as stress-management, digestive and immune health.

Eczema is a dry skin condition characterised by patches of inflamed, red, itchy skin.

There are small fluid-filled blisters which develop and subsequently burst giving the characteristic 'weepy' skin appearance.

The patches then crust over. Recurrent attacks lead to scarring and thickening of the skin which changes the colour and appearance of the skin, affecting its integrity and purpose.

Severe eczema is very distressing particularly if the face, neck and hands are affected. Many children outgrow this condition and in some it is also accompanied by hay fever and/or asthma as all 3 conditions fall in the band of allergic conditions called atopic allergy.

The herbal approach is to use a range of anti-inflammatories, demulcents and skin restoratives. In this respect, herbs such as calendula cream, chamomile cream or licorice cream are excellent.

Skin restoratives such as centella fixed oil or comfrey cream are great choices.

Anti-pruritic creams such as chickweed will prevent the intense itching and will also soothe the skin.

Long-term use of topical creams combined in a mixture that includes all these actions will restore skin integrity so that it begins to resemble healthy skin again.

Internal mixtures (either tinctures and/teas) that include chamomile, centella, licorice can also be considered.

A good combination for most dry skin conditions is a mixture of sarsaparilla and mahonia.

As eczema is an immune condition, a herb such as echinacea is invariably added in order to modify immune responses so that inflammation is kept to a minimum in predisposed individuals.

Owing to the general dryness in the system and the lack of moisture, supplementation of hemp seed oil is highly recommended.

This nutrient replenishes the fats that are essential to diet and general nutritional status.

Most dry conditions occur in systems that are deficient in these essential fatty acids (notably the omega fatty acids). They are also found naturally occurring in fatty fish (such as salmon, tuna, mackerel, herring, trout & sardines) as well as some nuts (eg. walnuts) and seeds (linseeds, hemp seed and others).

It is vital for the skin to have these fats for its healthy state and function. It can be added to smoothies but choose those that are not yoghurt-based as dairy aggravates the condition and be careful about the sugar content in these drinks.

Other supplements such as **vitamin C** (for wound healing and for general health and vitality of the skin), as well as zinc are also highly recommended.

The **mineral zinc** is an essential part of our immune system and is required to modulate the immune responses in the body. Inflammatory conditions can often result from a deficiency of zinc in the diet and studies have shown it to have a beneficial effect in eczema.