



Your Ally in Community Health  
Summer 2009

# Ithaca Health Alliance Newsletter

## Seasonal Allergies: Nothing to Sneeze at!

By Julia Lapp



### What are seasonal allergies?

Spring is in the air! It's a time for new growth of trees, grass, and weeds, which means that pollen is in the air, too. According to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, this time of year is the season for runny noses and itchy eyes for approximately 40 million Americans. Symptomatically, seasonal allergies are identified by the classic red, watery eyes, fatigue, and rhinitis (also referred to as hay fever), which includes sneezing and itchy, runny, or stuffy nose with clear drainage that doesn't go away.

Rhinitis is triggered when normally harmless pollens act as allergens to sensitive people. These pollens trigger white blood cells (leukocytes) to synthesize immunoglobulins (Ig) (also called antibodies). In the case of seasonal allergies (and allergies to things like dust mites, molds, or pests), a particular form of immunoglobulin — IgE — is produced. IgE binds to histamine containing cells (mast cells) that are plentiful in the lining of the mouth, nose, eyes, lungs, and digestive tract. When stimulated by IgE, these mast cells release histamine and other chemical mediators that produce inflammation of tissues and the classic allergic symptoms. In potentially allergic individuals, exposure to each allergen can stimulate the production of IgE variants specific to each allergen. That's why people differ in what they are allergic to.

### Diagnosing and treating seasonal allergies: Is it important to do?

For many people, seasonal allergies are mild enough not to warrant treatment. However, in more severe cases, rhinitis and the irritation of tissues lining the respiratory and digestive tracts can contribute to other conditions such as sleep disorders, headache and fatigue, digestive upset, and difficulties concentrating or learning. If you have seasonal allergies, treating with antihistamines can often manage the symptoms by keeping histamine production in check and thereby preventing the inflammation response.

In more severe cases, an allergist or immunologist can help. Physicians might prescribe stronger antihistamines, nasally inhaled corticosteroids, or decongestants. Skin tests or blood tests called radioallergosorbent (RAST) tests can determine specific

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## ITHACA FREE CLINIC HOURS AND OPERATIONS

Mondays: 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Tuesdays: 3 p.m. to 7 p.m.  
(services by appointment)

Thursdays: 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Located at 225 South Fulton Street, Suite B  
(upstairs), Ithaca, NY • (607) 330-1254

The Ithaca Free Clinic is a project of the **Ithaca Health Alliance**. More than 80 percent of our work is done through volunteer efforts. Whether you're interested in working with the Clinic or the Health Alliance, if you're looking for a volunteer opportunity, call the Clinic Coordinator at 607-330-1254.

### The Ithaca Health Alliance

IHA was founded in 1997. Our mission is to facilitate access to health care for all, with a focus on the needs of the un- and under-insured of New York State.

### Become a member of the IHA!

IHA members receive discounts from participating health providers and are eligible through the Ithaca Health Fund for grants and loans that pay for emergency and preventive care. To learn more about membership, call 607-330-1253 and ask to speak to the Office Manager.

### Information about the IHA

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### Seasonal Allergies, *continued from pg. 1*

allergic triggers. Immunotherapy (“allergy shots”) can be administered. These shots stimulate the immune system to become desensitized to the specific allergens, resulting in reduced symptoms and less need for medications.

### Are there other ways to manage seasonal allergies?

The first line of defense is to avoid the irritating agent. Controlling other indoor potential allergens like dust, dust mites, mildew, or molds can help. Using over-the-counter allergy nasal sprays can also control symptoms. However, they should not be used repeatedly for longer than a few days at a time because they lose their effectiveness and can cause worsened symptoms. Antihistamines also may have side effects when used on a regular basis. These side effects can include sleepiness, dry mouth, blurred vision, constipation, difficulty with urination, confusion, and light headedness. Regularly using a netti pot to flush out the sinuses with warm water and salt may help loosen and remove mucus. It will also hydrate and help heal the nasal tissues. Using plain eyewashes such as artificial tears can help relieve eye itchiness and irritation. Eye drops containing antihistamine are also effective.

Some herbs and supplements have shown moderate effectiveness with alleviating allergic symptoms. Omega 3 fatty acid supplements help reduce inflammation, as do culinary herbs such as cumin, turmeric, garlic, and rosemary. Local bee pollen supplement and local honey may help to “inoculate” and desensitize the immune response to allergens. Nettles and goldenseal may also alleviate symptoms. If you decide to try these options, consult with a trained naturopath or herbalist to find the appropriate herbs and how to use them safely. ❀

*Julia Lapp is a registered dietician and assistant professor of nutrition at Ithaca College. A former member of the Health Alliance board, she has been a long-time member of the Educational Subcommittee responsible for the production of this newsletter.*

# Allergies and Chinese Medicine

By Anthony Fazio

Chinese medicine does not consider the condition of 'allergies' to be a separate disease. Chinese medicine recognizes both the external causes of contagious and environmental diseases, as well as the role of each individual's constitution in illness. The outer causes of disease are referred to as 'EPIs' or External Pathogenic Invasions. This concept evolved from the prehistoric shamanic theories of evil spirit invasion; this became evil qi (qi = energy, force), which in turn became EPI. The model of atmospheric 'influence' causing illness in European medicine is directly related to this idea. Indeed, the word influenza still remains in present day medicine. Allergic triggers in Western medicine, such as dust, pollen, chemicals, animal dander, etc., are all categorized as 'pestilential evil.'

Each person has circulating qi or energy, which has many physiological functions. Protective or wei qi maintains the integrity of the skin surface, and how well it wards off invasion. The nearest corresponding concept would be resistance to colds, flus, etc. Nutritive or ying qi circulates more deeply, and tries to remain in balance with wei qi.

Wei qi and ying qi levels supply each other; if the Ying is preoccupied (e.g., immune deficiency, chronic disease, recovery from same, post-partum period, etc.), the wei shunts qi to the ying level to compensate, leaving itself open to EPI invasion. When the wei is under strain of invasion, the ying sends qi to that level to assist in repelling the invaders.

## **WIND is the bearer of 1,000 diseases**

If one's internal constitution is cold, dry, warm, hot, or damp, the addition of wind through exposure will result in a combination of the internal factor with the wind. Wind may also combine with these same factors, which are present as external climatic factors.

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## **Home-made Tofu**

Contributed by Deirdre Silverman

Slice 1 pound or one large block of extra firm tofu lengthwise into 3 pieces. Place in a pan just slightly larger than the pieces — you can cut them crosswise into smaller pieces if you like, but not thinner.

Mix together  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup tamari soy sauce, 2 tablespoons rice vinegar, 1 tablespoon dark roasted sesame oil and 2 teaspoons of molasses. Add 1 large glove garlic, crushed,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons of grated fresh ginger, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon of Chinese chili paste with garlic. Pour the sauce over the tofu pieces and turn the pieces over a few times to get them coated with the sauce. Bake at 375° for 45 minutes, turning the pieces twice during the cooking.

This recipe is amenable to endless variations. You can increase or decrease the amounts of garlic, ginger, and chili paste. You can use low-sodium tamari, wheat-free, or other varieties. You can add other seasonings, such as garam masala or 5-spice powder. It takes only a few minutes to prepare and the cost is about  $\frac{1}{3}$  that of store-bought tofu kan. It also tastes incredible — and totally different from the refrigerated version — when you eat it fresh and warm out of the oven. ❖

*Deirdre Silverman is vice-president of the board of the Ithaca Health Alliance. She works at Alternatives Federal Credit Union.*

## Chinese medicine, *continued from pg. 3*

Western biomedicine acknowledges the pathogenic nature of some specialized winds, most notably the Santa Ana, Mistral, Sirocco, and the lesser-known Karaburan. There are many more (several dozens) throughout the world, most of which have been recognized as capable of initiating or exacerbating disease states. Research from the Common Cold Unit in England indicates that wind strips electrons from air molecules, changing the electrical charge to positive. Positively charged air molecules have been shown to diminish immune responses, decrease body temperature, and increase mucus production while decreasing mucus discharge. Negatively charged air molecules conversely increase immune response, etc. Negative ions are created by running water, rainstorms (especially those accompanied by lightning discharges) and artificially by electronic devices, such as negative-ion generators.

Air-conditioning and central heating both can create artificial external EPIs such as wind/cold and wind/heat, respectively. Both also are considered dry. In addition, persons who work in artificially intemperate environments such as walk-in freezers, commercial kitchens, in the proximity of large furnaces, etc. are adding these EPI factors to their particular mixes.

The Chinese also realized the existence of such EPI factors that Western medicine would consider contagious diseases. To the sages of Chinese Medicine, these were called pestilential EPIs, and included allergic pathogens, as well as more severe diseases such as cholera and smallpox.

Proper dress is underrated in combating EPI invasion; so-called ‘undeveloped nations’ use, for the most part, common sense in dressing correctly (e.g., Berbers and other desert dwellers are well protected from wind and heat). Western individuals, sadly, are often improperly attired for weather, preferring peer-influenced attire for fashion. Nowhere is this more obvious than in Ithaca, NY.

The idea that the internal environment of each

individual is a factor in disease was adopted by the French after colonizing Indo-China in the 17th century, and incorporating some principles of Asian medicine. It exists to the present in French biomedicine as the concept of the terrain (internal environment).

**Western:** single cause → internal effects → signs

**Eastern:** disease factors ↔ external/internal changes  
 ↓ signs ↓

### EPI SOUPS

#### Spring Onion & Date Soup

20 red dates (Chinese)

5 scallion heads (white)

2 Tbsp. sesame seed

Boil w/one cup water; simmer until water is almost gone. Eat daily.

#### Barley & Date Soup

15 red dates

100 grams (a bit more than 3 ounces) barley

Boil w/two cups water; simmer until water is reduced to 3 ounces. Eat daily.

#### Nasal Congestion Tea

6 scallion heads

4–6 peppermint leaves (or one tea bag)

2 slices fresh ginger (or ½ tsp. ground ginger)

1 large slice fresh lemon (with rind)

1 Tbsp. honey

Simmer w/8 ounces water for 10 minutes; drink 3–4 times daily. ❀

Sources: *Acupuncture: How it Works, How it Cures*, Peter Firebrace & Sandra Hill, Keats Publishing, New Canaan, CT, c. 1993.

*Between Heaven and Earth*, Harriet Beinfeld and Ephrem Korngold, Ballantine Wellspring Publishing Group, NYC, c. 1988.

*Chinese System of Food Cures*, Henry C. Lu, Sterling Publishing Company, NYC, c. 1986.

*The Complete Illustrated Guide to Chinese Medicine*, Tom Williams, Element Publishing, (Gr. Britain, USA, Australia), c. 1996.

*Natural Remedies from the Chinese Cupboard*, Fang Jing Pei, Weatherhill, NYC, c. 1998.

# Allergies

By 7Song

There are a number of different types of allergies. This article will focus on the most common category of allergy, in which people have reactions to plant pollens (hay fever), animal dander, molds, dust, foods, and other aggravating factors. This kind of allergy has a few different names including Type 1, hypersensitivity, or antibody/antigen allergy.

The allergic response is an overreaction of our immune systems. Cells known as mast cells, which line our interface with the outside world (mucus membranes, skin, lungs, gastro-intestinal tract), overreact to a number of common stimuli (such as pollen) and in response release a chemical called histamine that sets off a chain of reactions, symptoms of which include runny nose, itchy eyes and throat, hives, sneezing, coughing, congested sinuses, and others. If you are interested in learning more, there are many readily available resources that give excellent insights into why this occurs. YouTube has some great animated videos, too.

Treatment of allergies should be at least two-fold. Generally the best course of action is reducing the triggers/allergens. While this is often not possible (it might mean not going outside in spring), you should learn what your specific triggers are, so that you can minimize exposure. Most other treatments are geared toward treatment after exposure, so prevention goes a long way here.

Since release of the histamine by the mast cells begins these uncomfortable responses, substances that reduce the release (known as antihistamines, Benadryl being one of the most popular), help to relieve symptoms. There are two herbs (one of which commonly grows around Ithaca) that can help relieve symptoms. The first is Ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*). This one is the hardest to understand, since the pollen from Ragweed causes up to 70% of hay fever symptoms locally. But for whatever strange reason, the leaves of this plant have a moderate anti-

histamine effect, and so can be used for any number of histamine-induced allergies, not just for hay fever. When I refer to the usefulness of this plant, the most common questions revolve around its use for people who are allergic to it. In all the years I have used it, I have only seen a worsening of symptoms a handful of times, so it may be worth a try. I find the fresh plant tincture of the leaves (made 1:3 95% ethanol) to be the most effective. Try just a drop or two initially to see if it helps clear up your symptoms. If they worsen, try another remedy.

I want to reiterate that I have rarely seen a problem with this remedy, and I use it frequently, but common sense says to try any medicine initially in small doses to check for untoward effects. Dosage (after initial testing) is about ½–2 droppers full (1–2 milliliters) as often as necessary. If your symptoms don't improve after trying it (and I have often it seen it fail to help) then try a different remedy.

And the second remedy I would suggest is Eyebright tincture (*Euphrasia officinalis*). Eyebright works almost as well as Ragweed as an antihistamine-type remedy, and you don't have to spend a half hour explaining it, as with Ragweed tincture. I use about the same amount, ½–2 droppers full as necessary.

A number of other herbs can be helpful for allergies, but these are two that you can experiment with as spring (and its attendant pollens) come ever closer to Ithaca. ♣

*7Song is director of the Northeast School of Botanical Medicine and the director of complementary and alternative medicine at the Ithaca Free Clinic. More information can be found at [www.7Song.com](http://www.7Song.com).*



## ASK YOUR HEALTH ALLIANCE

**Question:** How does the Health Alliance fund its programs?

**Answer:** The Health Alliance's premier program, the Ithaca Health Fund, is supported through memberships and targeted donations. At present, members number about 700, most residing in the immediate region, while several dozen members live in other parts of New York State. Regulations require that we limit memberships to NY residents. The work of Community Relations and Outreach, including the production of this newsletter and other educational projects, is funded through a combination of fund raising activities, grant applications, and a percentage of members' dues, in keeping with our long standing practice and the spirit of our bylaws. Grants awarded to community members (not necessarily IHA members) through a defined application process for health-related projects are made available with specifically designated funds held in trust at a local foundation.

Finally, the Free Clinic, originally funded with members' earmarked savings, is now largely financed through competitive grants and community donations. At this writing, IHA's fund raising goals are approximately \$50,000 shy of the amount we hoped to raise for the year in order to meet the objectives of all our programs. Of course, the board will continue to work to close the fund raising gap. Members are welcome to help in this endeavor. Visit our web site at [www.ithacahealth.org](http://www.ithacahealth.org) for more financial information about the Ithaca Health Alliance. ❖



## VOLUNTEER OF THE QUARTER

**Lindsay France** has been a volunteer with IHA since fall of 2008. She sits on the Community Relations Committee and is a professional graphic designer. Lindsay has made significant contributions to designing and coordinating IHA's print media. Her enthusiasm and reliability have made her an invaluable asset to the Alliance.

Lindsay is one of three full-time photographers for Cornell University, where she provides high-quality visuals to the University's communication and marketing efforts. Previous career experience includes eight years as an independent commercial and documentary photographer in New York City for a variety of corporate, editorial, and private clients; interactive design and production for Ogilvy & Mather, Microsoft, and Lowe Lintas; and facilitating photography workshops for elementary and middle schoolers.

Thanks for all you do, Lindsay France! ❖

# news U can use

## Chemical vs. Natural Bug Repellent

By Emily Reimann

The most common ingredient used in bug repellents sold over the counter is the chemical known as DEET, or diethyl toluamide. Although DEET has been shown to be effective in preventing tick as well as mosquito bites, it has also been shown that DEET can have detrimental effects on one's health as well as the environment. DEET-based products can cause skin irritations, hives, redness, and even blistering, burning, or scarring when used in high concentrations over an extended time. Long-term use of high concentrations has also been shown to result in insomnia and mood changes. DEET-based products are more dangerous when used on children and can result in neurological damage, such as disorientation, seizures, or even coma.

Is there a natural alternative? According to the Centers for Disease Control natural bug repellents that include essential oils such as lemon eucalyptus are just as effective as DEET and are environmentally friendly and chemical free. Water-based bug repellents can include peppermint, lavender, thyme, and lemongrass essential oils. Peppermint and thyme have been shown to ward off ticks, while lemongrass and lavender are effective against mosquitoes, black flies, and horse flies. Mixtures can also include bergamot, cinnamon, marjoram, rosemary, tea tree, thyme, and white camphor — all effective against ticks, flies, fleas, and mosquitoes! Catnip oil and citronella have also been proven to be great bug repellents, and basil and patchouli can be added to aid in protection.

Not only are these natural, organic bug repellents safer for one's health and the environment, but



## H1N1 Flu Update

By Amanda Magee

The current H1N1 flu virus, also known as Swine Flu, has become a serious concern for the general population and has been declared a “public health emergency of international concern” by the World Health Organization, in fear that it will grow worldwide. It is necessary that we take preventive precautions to avoid infection of ourselves and others. This is a serious issue compared to most other flu outbreaks because the flu virus has genetically mutated from infecting pigs to infecting humans. Not only the elderly and young are at risk, but also the flu has infected our generally healthy population of people between the ages of 18 and 45. Since we are all at risk, we must take the initiative to support and strengthen our immune systems.

One way you can do this is by daily diffusing the essential oil known as thieves. Rub a drop of the essential oil on your hands or the bottom of your feet. Another helpful suggestion is to combine 12 drops of thieves, 6 drops of oregano, and 2 drops of frankincense in a multi-green capsule. The oregano helps to fight bacterial infections and the thieves will help in strengthening immunity.

If we can keep ourselves healthy and strong, we can stop the spread of this virus! ❀

*Amanda Magee is a student at Ithaca College.*

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they also have a more pleasant odor than your typical over-the-counter bug spray. And it's quite easy to make your own! Here's a URL for your convenience: <[http://www.naturodoc.com/library/lifestyle/bug\\_repellent.htm](http://www.naturodoc.com/library/lifestyle/bug_repellent.htm)> ❀  
Source: <<http://health.nytimes.com/health/guides/poison/bug-sprays/overview.html?scp=6&sq=deet&st=cse>>

*Emily Reimann is a student at Ithaca College.*



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Find us online at

[www.ithacahealth.org](http://www.ithacahealth.org)

# Ithaca Health Alliance Newsletter

## **Volunteers in the News**

7Song, the director of holistic medicine at the Ithaca Free Clinic, was honored by the Human Services Coalition with the Anne T. Jones Award for his dedication as a volunteer at the Free Clinic.

Bethany Schroeder, president of the board of directors, was honored with the Tompkins Trust Company Award for Excellence for her work as a volunteer with the Health Alliance and Free clinic. The award included a check for \$1,200, which Ms. Schroeder donated to the IHA. ❖