

The

Liker Health Report



Keeping People Focused on Staying Fit & Healthy

Spring 2017

Springtime Allergies

Enjoy the Outdoors but Not the Sneezing, Coughing, and Itchy, Watery Eyes

Spring brings a colorful bouquet of flowers, plants and tree blossoms as the earth shakes off the coolness of winter and renews itself. Everyone loves spring, right? If you're one of the more than twenty million Americans who suffers with nasal allergies, the answer is likely a resounding "no".

An allergy is an abnormal reaction by the immune system to an otherwise benign substance, such as pollen, food, insect bite, or medication. Because the immune system's job is to protect against foreign substances called *antigens*, it acts by producing *antibodies* ("against the antigens") to destroy them as well as by releasing histamine (a substance that causes inflammation). This process is quite valuable when the antigen is a bacteria or virus that would cause illness if not destroyed by the antibodies. Sometimes the immune system is unable to distinguish between a pathogenic microbe and harmless pollen grains, and so the mode of attack is the same. Respiratory allergies are caused by airborne pollen, household dust, mold spores, mites, and animal dander. They produce symptoms such as runny or stuffy nose; sneezing; wheezing; itchy eyes, mouth, and/or throat; swollen throat; hives; or headache. Respiratory allergies are rarely dangerous, but they can be downright uncomfortable.

The most effective, but not necessarily practical treatment for allergies is to avoid the substances that trigger them. For example, wind can carry pollen miles from its source, so you have virtually no control over being exposed. To treat relatively minor allergies, over-the-counter medications are sufficient, but for severe or chronic allergies, a prescription medication may be necessary. Try reducing your exposure to allergens (*see tips below*), but if your symptoms are still severe or debilitating, check with your primary care physician.

Reducing Exposure to Allergens

Vaccum and clean regularly.

Change linens and bedding regularly.

Keep windows and doors closed on days when pollen counts are moderate or high.

Change air filters (in heating and air conditioning systems) regularly and/or install an air purifier.

Use HEPA filters in bedrooms and frequently-used rooms.

Remove carpet and rugs from bedrooms.

Do not allow pets in the bed or bedroom.

Wear a dust mask when cleaning or working in the yard.

Do not smoke indoors.

RESEARCH PEARLS:

Caffeine Helps the Brain

At least it does for postmenopausal women with a higher level of education. A 2016 study conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee involving 6,467 postmenopausal women found that drinking either three cups of coffee or five cups of black tea daily lowered their risk of dementia. Study participants had a 26% lower risk than women who drank less than one cup of coffee or one and a half cups of black tea daily. Researchers believe that the caffeine increases blood flow in the brain, prevents the build-up of brain plaque, and modulates adenosine levels. Adenosine is believed to regulate sleep, anxiety, cognitive ability and memory.

J Gerontol A Biol Sci Med Sci (2016)
71(12):1596-1602.



Yoga & Depression

Ancient Practice Brings Much Needed Relief

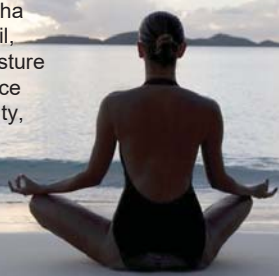
Boston University researchers recently learned that weekly yoga sessions which involve deep breathing and “mindful” movement help ease symptoms in people suffering with depression. According to the study, both people not taking anti-depressants and those taking medication regularly but not getting results were able to benefit from iyengar yoga.* This is good news for the approximately forty percent of people who don't see results from conventional pharmacological therapy.

The study involved thirty people with major depressive disorder. They were randomly assigned to partake in either three 90-minute yoga classes every week or two 90-minute classes every week. In addition to the structured sessions, participants practiced at home. The group that attended three weekly classes did experience fewer depressive symptoms and a greater improvement in mood, but researchers found that two classes was also quite effective.

Yoga's benefits are likely due to several factors. Like many other forms of exercise, the practice of yoga activates the release of the brain's “feel good” chemicals -- serotonin and dopamine. Yoga may also decrease inflammation and balance the immune system, thereby reducing the chemical messengers that otherwise worsen depression. Previous studies have shown that yoga decreases levels of the stress hormones cortisol and corticotropin. Meditation during yoga helps calm the mind and the effects last beyond the yoga session.

Because yoga targets a different neurochemical pathway than anti-depressants and because mood-altering drugs frequently have side effects, medical professionals are excited that yoga can potentially offer patients an effective treatment without side effects.

*Iyengar yoga is a form of hatha yoga, which emphasizes detail, precision and alignment in posture and breath control. The practice helps develop strength, mobility, and stability.



It's no coincidence that four of the six letters in health are “heal”.

Ed Northstrum

Dear Dr. Liker...

I'm concerned about outbreaks of food-borne illnesses. How can I keep track of these to know what's safe to eat?



A lot of these outbreaks are related to packaged salads, fresh vegetables, and meats that have been contaminated with pathogens that cause gastrointestinal distress which may lead to serious illness in some people, especially the young, elderly and those with weakened immune systems. The public typically learns of these outbreaks from the evening news, particularly when the number of infected people is increasing or when a well-known restaurant or food store chain is issuing a public statement or a product recall. Don't worry if you miss these notices because you can get all the information you need to keep you and your family healthy from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website. There is an “Outbreak” section on their homepage (<http://www.cdc.gov>) where you can get information about the specific tainted product, including the states affected; number of people infected; number of hospitalizations and deaths; and whether a recall has been issued. If a recall has been issued for a packaged product, the CDC identifies the specific lot number so you can compare it with the package in your refrigerator. If your product is from a lot that has been recalled, simply return it to the store you purchased it from. And, when in doubt, throw it out.

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