

Sinus and Chest Complaints

The respiratory system plays a vital role in supplying our body's oxygen needs and discharging carbon dioxide from the blood. Oxygen is used to convert nutrients into a form of energy that can be used by the body for growth, maintenance, repair and general health. Any disturbance or blockage of the flow of oxygen and carbon dioxide can lead to discomfort in the short term and more serious health problems affecting other organs and systems in the longer term.

Catarrh and Sinus Problems

These conditions are characterised by nasal congestion, excess mucus, headaches, runny nose, post-nasal drip, sore throats and ear problems. There may be pain, redness, and swelling of the sinuses. These problems are often associated with upper respiratory infections such as colds and flu, but in the longer term may be associated with allergic tendencies.

Hayfever

The well-known symptoms of hay fever (or seasonal allergic rhinitis) include sneezing, itchy nose, nasal congestion, tickly throat and sore streaming eyes. The symptoms are caused by an allergic response to grass or tree pollen, house dust, animal dander and airborne fungus spores. These allergens, which are harmless to most people, can cause a massive over-reaction by the body's immune system in sensitive individuals.

Allergic tendencies can be inherited, but the root cause of the problem usually lies in an imbalance of the immune system, leading to hypersensitivity. Factors adding to this imbalance include poor diet, stressful lifestyle, infection or underlying illness – all of which can weaken our defence system, making us more susceptible to allergies. The only cure for hayfever is to completely avoid the allergens. However, dietary and lifestyle changes can improve immune system function, helping to protect from allergies and reduce sensitivities. Herbal medicine can support the immune system and alleviate the symptoms.

Asthma

Attacks are caused by a constriction of the lungs, causing difficulty in breathing, wheezing and a feeling of suffocation. There is often an allergic component in asthma attacks caused by sensitivity to pollen, house dust, chemicals and animal hair, but other triggers include exercise, stress, infection and colds. Once again, there is no cure for asthma, but the frequency and severity of attacks can be reduced by dietary and lifestyle changes. Herbal medicine can be

used to support the lungs and the immune system, and thus lessen the allergic responses.

Diet

Many foods can worsen respiratory problems, especially where allergies are a causative factor. Cows' milk contains large proteins that often cause allergic reactions. All dairy products, including milk, cheese, yoghurt, cream, butter and eggs, tend to increase mucus production and should be avoided. Soya milk, oat milk and rice milk can be used as alternatives. Other foods that should be avoided include artificial additives, coffee, tea, sugars, red meat and animal fats.

Foods that can improve these problems in the airways are fresh fruits and vegetables, especially garlic, onions, leeks and chilli peppers. All of these reduce respiratory allergic response. Many hayfever sufferers may find that redwheat (a member of the grass family) can bring some relief from symptoms.

Vitamins A, C, and E are known as anti-oxidants and work to prevent damage to the mucous membranes that line the nasal sinuses and respiratory tract. They also help to check excessive nasal catarrh and build up resistance to respiratory infections. Vitamin C helps to deliver oxygen to all the tissues of the body, and helps to prevent bacterial and viral infections. Rich food sources of anti-oxidants include carrots, spinach, yams, oranges, red and green peppers, apricots, liver and spinach.

Agricultural pesticides can cause allergic reactions, so all fruit and vegetables should be well washed. Organic food is ideal, and at last is becoming increasingly available and cheaper to buy.

Lifestyle

Herbal practitioners will discuss both diet and lifestyle with their patients, and help them to improve both, thus helping to overcome the patient's sinus problems.

Many respiratory conditions are associated with allergies linked to local irritants such as dust, fumes, smoke, chemicals and perfumes. Isolating and avoiding the cause of the problem can give immediate relief from symptoms.

Stress causes an increase in adrenal gland hormones preparing the body for 'fight or flight'. In the short term, this can be a useful response to a dangerous situation. However, if the stress continues for long periods, this response weakens our defence system and can lead to ill-health. A period of quality relaxation and restful sleep is a

time for renewal, promoting overall health, vitality and enhancing the immune system.

Regular gentle exercise such as walking and yoga also increases vitality, improves energy levels, strengthens the circulation and helps to alleviate stress.

Supplements

The ideal source of vitamins and minerals is from our food. However, it can be beneficial to take supplements to safeguard dietary intake and to ensure the supply of nutrients required for optimum health.

A good quality multi-vitamin supplies all the required nutrients in a form that can be absorbed by the body. Anti-oxidant formulas consist of vitamins A,C and E, together with the minerals selenium and zinc. This group is considered essential in the formation and maintenance of healthy body tissues and an efficient immune system.

Herbal Products

Not surprisingly, there are many herbs traditionally used to support the body during attacks of sinus and chest problems. However, should symptoms persist for more than a few weeks, it is always advisable to arrange a consultation with a qualified medical herbalists.

Useful herbs include:

- *Chamomile* – reduces allergic symptoms such as those experienced in hayfever. Its anti-inflammatory effects help to soothe irritation of the eyes, nose and throat. Combines well with Nettle & Plantain which strengthen, cool and calm
- *Yarrow* – promotes sweating and raises the body temperature to fight infection. Works best in conjunction with Elderflower and Peppermint.
- *Boneset* – Traditionally used where there is fever accompanied by aching bones. It stimulates the immune system and is an important herb where flu symptoms are concerned.
- *Echinacea* – An important herb for the immune system improving our resistance to bacteria and infection.
- *Marshmallow* – Used for centuries for its soothing effect on the lungs, easing coughing and encouraging gentle expectoration
- *Plantain* – strengthens the mucous membranes of the respiratory tract, reducing symptoms of allergy and drying up

excess mucus production, often associated with cold and sinus problems. Combines well with eyebright.

- *Thyme* – Thyme has a high volatile oil content which is strongly antiseptic and is therefore an effective herb in the treatment of cold and chest infections.
- *Garlic* - Garlic is one of the most effective anti-microbial herbs available acting on bacteria, viruses and digestive tract parasites. Combines well with thyme and plantain for coughs and colds.
- *Nettle* – Nettle has a natural anti-histamine effect beneficial in treating allergies such as hayfever. It helps by reducing the symptoms such as itchy eyes, runny nose and sneezing.

Essential Oils

Oils such as eucalyptus, peppermint, thyme and tea tree can be used in vaporisers, steam inhalations, massage and aromatherapy baths. For further guidance on using essential oils please seek advice from our Dispensary Assistants.

As with all health problems, we strongly recommend that you consult a qualified medical herbalist to create a specific prescription and treatment plan to meet your individual needs.

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