

# Managing Seasonal Allergies

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Late winter/early spring is a difficult time of year for the many sufferers of seasonal allergies. People often experience a significant reduction in their quality of life: chronic nasal congestion, sneezing and itchy or watery eyes. A comprehensive natural approach to the assessment and treatment of allergies can help many people feel healthier and more comfortable through this season.

## Identify and Remove Allergens

If it hasn't already been done, the first step in seasonal allergy management is proper allergy testing. An allergy specialist can perform skin prick testing where a minute amount of a potential allergen is injected under the skin and the area is observed for any reaction. This test identifies immediate reaction allergies and can be helpful in determining which airborne allergens are triggers. If one is highly reactive to household allergens such as dust, mold and pet dander, then maintaining a very clean home is important.

The presence of underlying food allergies can worsen seasonal reactivity to airborne allergens. These delayed reaction allergies are assessed by many naturopathic physicians through a blood test for IgG antibodies against many common foods. Identifying and removing underlying food allergies can help reduce seasonal "hay fever" symptoms.


## Balance Your Immune System

Allergies are a sign that your immune system is over-responding to substances in our external environment. There are several natural treatment options to help balance or modulate the immune system and decrease seasonal allergic symptoms. Immune balancing properties have been observed in fish oil, probiotics (beneficial intestinal bacteria), plant sterols and vitamin D.

## Support Adrenal Function

After periods of prolonged stress the hormone cortisol produced by our adrenal glands can become deficient. As cortisol has a strong anti-inflammatory effect in the body low levels can contribute to increased allergic reactions. Assessing adrenal function through salivary cortisol testing can allow naturopathic doctors to recommend a personalized treatment protocol to restore stress hormone balance as quickly as possible.

## Manage The Symptoms

For those who are not able to determine any underlying triggers of their seasonal allergies, natural medicine has options to help minimize and manage the symptoms. The herb, nettle leaf, can help decrease sneezing and itchy eyes. Butterbur is another herb that has fared well in clinical trials when compared to standard antihistamine medications. Quercetin is a flavonoid nutritional supplement that has anti-histamine and anti-inflammatory activity, which many people find helpful for controlling their allergy symptoms. 

## References:

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Leonardi, S. MD Atopic disease, immune system and the environment. Allergy Asthma Proc., Aug 2007 410-7.



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