

DISEASE OF THE MONTH

vol. 1. Sept. 2008

Allergic Rhinitis

What is it?

Allergic rhinitis is the summary of symptoms including nasal congestion, itching, and sneezing caused by exposure to irritants including dust, animal dander, smoke, and pollen. When a person is first exposed to specific irritants, certain Ig E antibodies are created and bind onto the mast cells of the upper respiratory tract. Subsequent exposure of these allergens provoke an excessive release of histamine. Histamine causes an increase in the permeability of the epithelial lining within the sinus cavities, resulting in heavy bouts of sneezing due to overstimulation of the nerve-endings. This is followed by high amounts of nasal discharge and eventual blockage.

If sinus drainage is obstructed due to the swollen mucosa, infection of the paranasal or sphenoidal sinus cavities can result, commonly leading to sinusitis.

Symptoms

Allergic rhinitis will usually manifest with sneezing, profuse runny nose with white or watery discharge, stuffy nose, slight headache, and watery eyes.

Western Treatment

The classic Western medical treatment for treating allergies involves taking allergy medication that typically fall under categories including:

- 1) Oral antihistamines
- 2) Nasal antihistamines
- 3) Decongestants
- 4) Nasal Sprays

Side-Effects of Medication:

Many of these types of medication act as either histamine blockers, suppressing the immune response (steroids), or by constricting the blood vessels in the sinus cavities. With their wide-ranging actions, the side-effects of these medications can greatly vary. Adverse side-effects can include but are not limited to mild drowsiness and dry-mouth to nausea, heart palpitations, insomnia, or even hypertension. Severity of symptoms will largely depend on the dose, length of treatment, and overall health of the patient. Several of the medications will require special precautions such as avoiding alcohol during treatment or avoid during pregnancy.

Craig Amrine L.Ac. is the owner and operator of Hidden Rhythm Acupuncture located in the heart of Tempe, Arizona. These monthly newsletters are designed to help educate the public on various afflictions that acupuncture as a part of Traditional Chinese Medicine is known to treat. Each month, Craig will address a new health challenge that commonly affects the general public and offer a brief explanation on each disease from both the Western perspective as well as from the Traditional Chinese Medical perspective. He will also offer his own thoughts on treatment based on personal clinical observation and treatment experience.



The Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) Perspective

Allergic rhinitis is considered to be a “wind-cold” invasion characterized by sneezing, and a white or watery discharge from the nose. Normally, both the defensive-Qi systems governed by the Lung and Kidneys can successfully expel pathogens before they take root in the body and cause serious harm. In cases of allergic rhinitis however, the immune system is hyper-reactive due to a deficiency of both the Lung-Qi and Kidney-Qi defense mechanisms. Normally, the Lungs aid in the defensive system to protect the body from external pathogens. The kidneys help power the lungs and are responsible for overall personal development including birth, growth, and sexual development.

Deficiency of the Lung and Kidney Qi defense systems can be due to a number of factors including hereditary, problems during pregnancy or childbirth, or can be incurred later in life due to factors such as over-work, excessive use of drugs or antibiotics, or excessive sexual activity.

Treatment using Traditional Chinese Medicine:

During treatment, it is important to treat both the root of the disease (Kidney-Qi deficiency) as well as manifestation (Lung-Qi deficiency and wind-cold invasion in the nose). So, acupuncture treatments include both tonifying Lung and Kidney Qi to reduce the hypersensitivity to irritants, expelling the wind-cold from the nose, and draining phlegm to eliminate the congestion.

What is the difference between Allergic Rhinitis and Sinusitis?

To put it simply, sinusitis is usually defined by a sinus infection due to repeated attacks of allergic rhinitis. While allergic rhinitis is characterized by itching, sneezing and excessive white or runny discharge from the nose, sinusitis is more characterized by stuffy nose, thick/yellow nasal discharge, feelings of heat, diminished sense of smell, and a bitter taste.

While acupuncture treatments may be similar for both afflictions, allergic rhinitis treatments will address the underlying Kidney deficiency while sinusitis treatments will focus more on addressing the accompanying heat component of the disease.

Craig’s final word(s):

During the spring and summer months, a huge population around the country and within Phoenix struggle with allergies. I’m amazed on how many TV commercials are shown advertising the latest in allergy medication, but then only briefly mention the ridiculous list of risks and side-effects of this latest “medical breakthrough”. New patients will tell me stories how they are forced to sleep sitting upright in a chair because of the sinus pain, and that they can’t stand the negative side-effects of sinus and allergy medication. My personal experience treating rhinitis with acupuncture has been incredibly encouraging. Most of my patients will experience dramatic improvements after just a few treatments. I personally consider this affliction one of the easiest to treat. I must emphasize however that while patients will experience huge changes after just a few treatments that lead many to believe they are “cured”, treating the hypersensitivity component of the the allergy *does* take a bit longer.

