



Tai-Nan Wang L.Ac., O.M.D.

4295 Gesner Street, Suite 1A
San Diego, CA 92117
619-684-1848

Get Seasonal Allergy Relief!

Acupuncture has been used to treat seasonal allergies for centuries with great success. According to traditional medicine, treatment is directed toward clearing the nasal passages, supporting the immune system, and strengthening the systems of the body to prevent allergic reactions from recurring.



What Are Seasonal Allergies?

Commonly called hay fever or allergic rhinitis, a seasonal allergy is an allergic reaction to a trigger that is typically only present for part of the year, such as spring or fall. Pollens that are spread by the wind are usually the main cause. People who are allergic to pollens are also often sensitive to dust mites, animal dander, and molds.

Spring is traditionally the main season when allergies blossom because of new growth on trees and weeds. Fall, which ushers in a whole different set of blooming plants, as well as leaf mold, is a close second. Airborne mold spores can be found almost year round, along with other common allergens such as dust, dust mites, and animal dander.

About 26 million Americans endure chronic seasonal allergies, while the number of people with milder symptoms may be as high as 40 million, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

Seasonal allergies are caused by the body's hypersensitivity to substances in the environment. Symptoms primarily involve the membrane lining the nose, causing allergic rhinitis, or the membrane lining the eyelids and covering the whites of the eyes, causing allergic conjunctivitis.

While there are many medications to treat the symptoms of seasonal allergies, these treatments can cause unwanted side effects, such as drowsiness and immune system suppression, as well as an over-reliance on medications. These side effects have motivated many people to search for alternative approaches like acupuncture and Oriental medicine to manage their allergies.

How Acupuncture Treatments Provide Relief from Allergies

According to Oriental medicine, allergic rhinitis is related to wind and a deficiency of the protective Wei Qi. Wei Qi is the Qi, or energy, that flows at the surface of the body as a protective sheath and is responsible for resistance to colds and other respiratory infections. People with a deficiency of Wei Qi catch colds easily and are more susceptible to allergens.

When treating with acupuncture, underlying imbalances within the body are addressed and a treatment plan is developed to relieve the acute symptoms of allergic rhinitis, while also treating the root problems that are contributing to the body's reaction to allergens. Treatments often include dietary modification, the use of specifically chosen herbal formulas, and acupuncture.

Seasonal acupuncture treatments just four times a year also serve to tonify the inner organ systems and can correct minor annoyances before they become serious problems.

If you experience seasonal allergies, now is the time to schedule an appointment. Call for a consultation today!

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Oriental Medicine for Asthma Symptom Relief

Asthma is a chronic disease that causes inflammation in the lungs and, consequently, a narrowing of the bronchial tubes--also known as the air passages. This makes breathing difficult since the airflow is restricted. Tell-tale signs of asthma include wheezing, shortness of breath, coughing, and a feeling of tightness in the chest. Substances and conditions that may cause or worsen the symptoms of asthma include physical activity, cold air, smoke, emotional distress, some medications, gastro-esophageal reflux disease (GERD) and airborne toxins and allergens such as pollen, mold, dust, and animal dander.

There are also certain risk factors to be aware of. These include being overweight, smoking, having a family member diagnosed with asthma, and/or being afflicted with a separate allergic condition. Conventional medical treatment offers a variety of pharmaceutical drugs, which are specific to the patient's triggers and symptoms of asthma. If you suffer from asthma, additional treatment from your acupuncture and Oriental medicine practitioner may prove to be a winning combination.

A study called "Immunomodulatory Effects of Acupuncture in the Treatment of Allergic Asthma: A Randomized Controlled Study," published in 2007 in *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, demonstrates the valuable role acupuncture and Oriental medicine can play in the treatment of symptoms of asthma.

Patients suffering from bronchial asthma were divided into two groups: a control group and a study group. The control group received acupuncture treatments that did not specifically treat their condition, while the study group received the appropriate acupuncture treatments. Before and after each treatment, information was collected on all patients regarding their general well-being and blood work samples gathered.

At the end of the study, it was shown that 79 percent of the study group felt an improvement in their general well-being as opposed to only 47 percent of the control group. Significant improvements in the immune system were detected from the blood samples collected by the study group as well. The authors of the study were able to conclude that acupuncture, in conjunction with standard Western medical treatment, provides outstanding improvements to the immune system.

Additionally, there are a few things one can do at home to help lessen the severity of asthma symptoms. According to the theory of acupuncture and Oriental medicine, the environment plays an important role in the health of an individual. For example, if one lives in a cold, damp environment, it may prove to be problematic. Not only may the cold contribute to constriction of the bronchial tubes, but the damp air may foster mold or other airborne pollutants that can irritate the air passages as well.

While it may not be possible to move to another climate, it is possible to focus on removing dust, animal dander, and other pollutants from your home. If your home is damp, consider using a dehumidifier, as this will help in eliminating mold. Sometimes breathing in cold air can cause wheezing and trouble breathing, so covering your mouth and nose in an effort to warm your breath may be helpful.

For soothing relief on a cold day, try a nourishing, warm soup. Keep the ingredients simple, such as vegetables, rice, lean meat, and herbs. The less processed and refined your food is, the easier it is on your digestive system. According to the theory of acupuncture and Oriental medicine, phlegm is produced in the stomach, but stored in the lungs. This is a direct reference to the importance of eating well and avoiding phlegm-producing foods. Consider reducing your intake of dairy products, sugar, and fatty foods.

Maintaining a healthy weight and exercising every day will help strengthen your immune system too. If you are finding it difficult to lose weight and lack motivation to exercise, this is something your practitioner of acupuncture and Oriental medicine can assist you with. If an addiction to smoking is causing or worsening your symptoms of asthma, there are acupuncture treatment protocols to help reduce cravings for nicotine and other substances.

April Showers!

As spring begins to roll around so do allergies, aches and pains. So don't let the April showers dampen your mood and your health! Instead head over to Tai-Nan Wang Acupuncture to help you with an current or new physical problems with the beginning of spring. Whether we can assist with herbal supplements or acupuncture, if you feel like you need a little immune system spring cleaning give us a call today!

- A new study shows acupuncture may provide some allergy relief

Acupuncture already helps to relieve pain in some patients, and the latest study hints that it might relieve sneezing and itchy eyes as well.

Most patients plagued with sniffles brought on by seasonal allergies turn to antihistamines for relief, but when they don't get relief, some opt for alternative treatments like acupuncture, in which tiny needles inserted just under the skin at specific points in the body are used to reduce certain symptoms.

In a study published in the journal *Annals of Internal Medicine*, researchers examined 422 people who tested positive for pollen allergies and had allergic nasal symptoms such as a runny nose. The participants reported their symptoms as well as what medication and doses they used to treat them.

The researchers then divided them into three groups; one received 12 acupuncture treatments and took antihistamines as needed, a second group received 12 fake acupuncture treatments (needles placed at random, non-meaningful points in the body) and took antihistamines as needed, while the final group only took antihistamines for symptoms.

After two months, the researchers asked the patients about their symptoms and how much medication they used. The participants who received the real acupuncture treatments with their antihistamines showed a greater improvement in their allergy symptoms and less use of antihistamines compared to the other groups. But the fact that even the participants receiving the sham acupuncture therapy reported some relief of their symptoms suggests that a strong placebo effect may be responsible for at least part of the improvement. That possibility was supported by the fact that after four months of follow-up, the difference between the groups was less pronounced. The researchers speculate that the patients' expectations of how much the acupuncture might help them could have influenced their reports of improved symptoms.

But if the treatments are providing some type of relief, then acupuncture's potential role in treating allergies should be investigated further, the authors say. "The effectiveness of acupuncture for (seasonal allergies) compared with other antiallergic interventions and the possible underlying mechanisms of any effect, including context effects, need to be addressed in further research," they write in the study.

That view is supported by Dr. Remy Coeytaux of the Duke Clinical Research Institute and Dr. Jongbae of the Regional Center for Neurosensory Disorders and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who wrote an editorial accompanying the study.

They note that acupuncture's benefits have started to emerge over the last 15 years and enough high-quality clinical trials support "patient-level meta-analyses for several clinical indications." They suggest that more rigorous research, which would include comparing acupuncture with existing treatments for conditions such as allergies, should be conducted in coming years.

They write: "It may be time to begin asking such questions as: How does acupuncture compare directly with other therapeutic approaches? Which of the many acupuncture traditions or approaches is most effective or appropriate for a given clinical indication? What outcomes or process measures should we be assessing in clinical trials of acupuncture? Is the magnitude of effect, if any, associated with acupuncture for a given clinical indication 'worth it' from the perspective of patients, payers, or policymakers?"

In the meantime, study author Dr. Benno Brinkhaus of the Institute for Social Medicine, Epidemiology and Health Economics at Charit© University Medical Center in Berlin wrote in an e-mail response describing the

study that "From my experience as a physician and acupuncturist, and as a researcher, I would recommend trying acupuncture if patients are not satisfied with the conventional anti-allergic medication or treatment or they suffer from more or less serious sides effects of the conventional medication. Also because acupuncture is a relative safe treatment."

We here at Tai-Nan Wang Acupuncture always strive to help you be at your health prime and we hope to hear from you soon!

Foods to Fight Allergies

Having a healthy diet is one of the best ways to support your overall health. When possible, incorporate the following foods into your meals to give your body additional tools to fight allergies:

Ginger:

Ginger is a natural antihistamine and decongestant. It may provide some relief from allergy symptoms by dilating constricted bronchial tubes.

Apples:

Apples (with the skin on) contain the flavonoid quercetin, which can cross-react with tree pollen.

Quercetin can reduce allergic reactions by having an antihistamine effect. It also decreases inflammation. Additionally, quercetin occurs naturally in other foods like berries, red grapes, red onions, capers, and black tea.

Carrots:

Carotenoids are a family of plant pigments that include beta-carotene.

A lack of carotenoids in the diet is thought to promote inflammation in your airways.

Other than carrots, good sources of carotenoids include apricots, pumpkin, sweet potato, spinach, kale, butternut squash, and collard greens.

Omega-3:

Omega-3 essential fatty acids can counter the formation of chemicals that cause inflammation of the air passages. Good natural sources include flaxseed oil and salmon.

Yogurt:

Food sensitivities seem to be connected with seasonal allergies. In a study conducted at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine, patients who were fed 18 to 24 ounces of yogurt a day experienced a decline in their environmental allergic symptoms by 90 percent.

Fiber:

A healthy and active colon can decrease food sensitivity, which, in turn, can lighten the burden on your immune system and may reduce the impact of seasonal allergies.

For maximum colon health, increase the fiber in your diet. Some fiber-rich foods include beans, avocado, and pears.

