

Combating the Symptoms of Seasonal Allergies with Traditional Chinese Medicine

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As the fall season approaches, one of the most common complaints that patients have is the onset of seasonal allergies. During this time pollen counts are high triggering many of us to have allergy attacks, otherwise known as hay fever or seasonal allergic rhinitis (AR). The main culprit of these attacks of seasonal allergic rhinitis is ragweed pollen, which affects 85 to 90 percent of Fall-allergy victims.

Symptoms of seasonal allergic rhinitis (AR) include nasal congestion, watery nasal discharge and sneezing, red and itchy eyes. These symptoms are commonly treated with medications such as antihistamines, steroid inhalers, and over the counter decongestant sprays. While these medications may temporarily relieve the symptoms of seasonal allergic rhinitis, they do come with several side effects including sedation, dizziness, fatigue, insomnia, nervousness, and gastro-intestinal disturbances.

Many patients are turning to complementary medical treatments such as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) to relieve these symptoms of seasonal AR. TCM, which includes Chinese herbal medicine (CHM) and acupuncture, dates back over 2000 years. It is a unique, holistic form of medical treatment that looks at the entire constitution of a patient to determine the underlying imbalances within the patient's body. By identifying these imbalances, acupuncturists are able to simultaneously treat the root cause of the problem as well as alleviate the symptoms.

Symptoms of seasonal AR have been treated with acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine for centuries in China. Clinical trials have shown that acupuncture and CHM are an effective and safe treatment option for patients with seasonal AR. For example, a recent randomized-controlled study demonstrated that acupuncture can result in a 66 percent reduction in symptom severity of seasonal AR and that the use of Chinese herbal medicine can reduce the symptoms of seasonal AR by up to 63 percent without adverse side effects.

Acupuncture stimulates self-healing mechanisms allowing the body to process and filter out the allergens. In acupuncture, fine needles are inserted superficially through the skin at specific points along the body stimulating the dispersion and flow of energy or "Qi". Qi is the TCM concept for acupuncture-related stimulation of the nervous system, which has been shown to mediate physiological changes associated with this therapy. Some of the points chosen for seasonal AR are located around the sinuses and nose, while other points are located on different parts of the body. Upon insertion of these needles, most patients feel immediate relief of the allergy symptoms. Sinus pressure is decreased, nasal passages are unblocked, itchy eyes subside and the patient is able to breathe more easily through the nose.

In the treatment of seasonal AR, the best time to receive acupuncture treatment is one month prior to the usual time of the seasonal allergy attack. Ideally, a patient should seek acupuncture treatment before the start of the symptoms. However, if the symptoms have already begun, treatment(s) will bring symptomatic relief and will support the immune system, thereby preventing future allergy attacks.

Ways to avoid seasonal allergy attacks in the fall are to keep windows closed whenever possible, use air conditioning to keep you cool when necessary, shower and change clothes immediately after being outdoors, avoid going out between 5:00 am and 10:00 am when pollen levels are highest. Limit the use of a humidifier since they can actually cause mold to accumulate in the house making allergies worse. Eat a healthy diet that is limited in milk, processed sugar and yeast containing foods. Sugar, dairy products, and yeast containing foods create an overabundance of dampness in the body which will aggravate the symptoms of nasal congestion and nasal discharge. These foods also can contribute to the severity of seasonal AR and affect the duration and persistence of its symptoms. Lastly, take a multivitamin to help maintain your body's defenses and get plenty of rest. Optimizing your immune function helps your body resist the allergens that cause seasonal AR thereby preventing the allergy symptoms from reoccurring year after year.

For more information on how acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine can help prevent and relieve seasonal allergic rhinitis, please call 949-646-4325.

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