

HAY FEVER - TIME FOR SOMETHING DIFFERENT

It is hay fever time again. For many that means the misery of living for up to the three months of the summer with its debilitating symptoms. Most people have tried antihistamines and other drugs but many have not yet tried the ancient art of traditional Chinese acupuncture.

Acupuncture treatment offers a unique approach to hay fever as every person is treated with their own carefully tailored programme. The treatment plan is designed to re-balance the energies of the body that are seen, by a carefully structured traditional diagnostic approach, to be out of harmony.

Getting treatment before the season starts can help prevent hay fever appearing by ensuring the body is in the best possible health. If symptoms have started, acupuncture can be used to help reduce the misery. The runny nose, the itchy eyes, the sneezing, the wheezing and sore throat can all be helped by the use of carefully selected acupuncture points.

Some people may be put off by the thought of needles being inserted into the skin. Gisela Norman, acupuncturist, says about the fear of needles:

"Often patients who have a fear of needles do not realise how very thin our needles are. The needles are not painful but may cause a slight tingling or achy sensation

Many people suffer with runny nose and itchy, red eyes when pollen counts are high. But there are plenty of steps you can take to relieve hayfever symptoms.

Symptoms and causes

Hay fever symptoms include: a blocked, runny and/or itchy nose; watering, itchy and red eyes; frequent sneezing; a tickly or sore throat, a heavy head and tiredness.

Hay fever is a type of allergic rhinitis that occurs at particular times of year, usually spring and summer, when pollen counts are high. Allergic rhinitis, which can occur at any time, is an inflammation of the nose caused by reaction to an allergen in the air or in food.

Common rhinitis triggers include mould spores, animal hairs house dust and mites, while hay fever is often caused by pollen from grasses, trees and plants. When a sensitive person breathes in one of these allergens the body reacts by producing histamine, which causes inflammation, increased mucus and congestion. Food allergies can also trigger this effect.

One study found that the use of a single acupuncture point - on the liver channel on the foot effectively reduced hay fever symptoms. Treatment for hay fever is

best started well in advance of the pollen season. Combining acupuncture with Chinese herbs can also help allergic rhinitis.

Self-help tips

- Avoid known allergens as much as possible. Test for food allergies if they're suspected.
- Stay indoors and close windows when pollen count is high.
- Wash your face with cool water when returning indoors to clear away pollen.
- Reduce house dust and mites by regular cleaning with a damp cloth and a vacuum cleaner designed to filter very small particles. Air rooms every day. Wash bedding in very hot water (60C) to kill dust mites.
- Use hypoallergenic covers for mattresses and pillows.
- Keep pets out of the house or at least the bedroom.
- Keep soft toys to a minimum and put them in the freezer regularly to kill off mites.
- Increase intake of **vitamin C** and bioflavonoids (found in citrus fruits or available as a supplement) and take pantothenic acid.
- **Improve your diet** to ease the load on the liver, which helps regulate allergic reactions. Reduce junk food, **tea, coffee, sugar and fats**.
- Increase **vegetables**, citrus fruits, wholegrains, garlic and natural honey, such as manuka. As a preventative measure start eating **local honey** daily in the winter to build the immune system to prepare for springtime.
- Certain herbs are natural anti-histamines. Try teas made from anise, ginger or peppermint.
- Nettle supplements ease allergy symptoms by reducing nasal inflammation.
- **Garlic** and raw onion can ease congestion and help breathing.

Bee pollen or honeycomb and Chinese herbal remedies can be helpful when taken in advance of the hay fever season.

Gisela Norman, Acupuncturist: 07968 855 001

Park Lane Practice: 01249 655 088

Kingswood Natural Health Centre: 0117 914 5590