

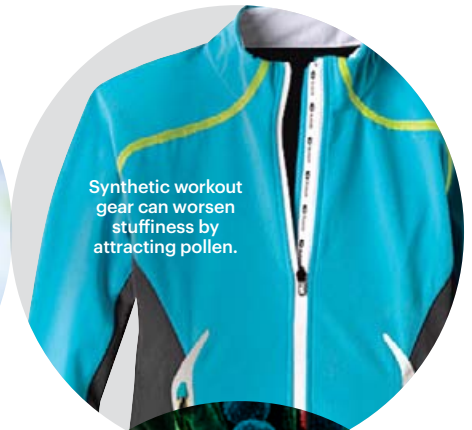
+HEALTH NEWS



Certain compounds in carrots could set off a minor reaction.



Urban planners sometimes favor the London plane tree, even though it can make you sneeze.



Synthetic workout gear can worsen stuffiness by attracting pollen.



Warmer, more humid days trap air pollutants, making symptoms worse.



Honey may contain pollen from plants, which can trigger a reaction.



Ragweed pollen is one of the most common triggers for summer allergies.



Birch tree pollen is a common airborne allergen, especially in spring.



Chamomile may spark mild symptoms in allergy sufferers.



Flooding from superstorms can up the amount of pollen plants produce.

are these making you sick?

If you're drained of energy, congested or itchy, crazy triggers plus skyrocketing allergen levels may be to blame. Here's how to feel better and have more energy now! By Leslie Goldman

It's spring, and suddenly you feel like hell: stuffed up, foggy, itchy, exhausted! You can't figure it out because it's not a cold (it goes on forever) and you've never had allergies. Until now. One or more of the factors above could be your new worst enemy. "All of a sudden at age 25, you can develop seasonal allergies, even if you've never had them before," explains Beth Corn, M.D., a fellow

of the American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology. And if you do come down with them as an adult, she adds, "It's possible that you'll have allergies for life."

Not that it's any comfort, but you're not suffering alone: The number of Americans who endure itching, sneezing and congestion due to triggers like tree, grass and weed pollen has doubled in the last two decades,

according to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA). One reason: climate change, which is cranking up the amount of pollen in the environment. "Climate conditions are the most likely reason why allergenic plants like ragweed are starting to pollinate earlier and die later, and with this increased exposure, people are more affected," explains Leonard Bielory, M.D., a professor at Rutgers

University's Center for Environmental Prediction. Superstorms make things even worse: Last year saw one of the highest tree-pollen counts in the Northeastern United States in the last 25 years. When Superstorm Sandy saturated the ground, it provided extra nutrients that acted like steroids on many pollen-bearing plants.

Urban planning is another modern contributor. City landscapers often fill "green" areas with allergy-causing trees and, if the species is gendered, tend to plant males, which shed lots of pollen. What's more, the allergenfest will likely become more intense: Dr. Bielory predicts that pollen levels will rise 20 percent by 2020. And an Italian research review found that climate changes may encourage the development of even more allergenic super pollens.

But there's good news, too. Researchers are busily delving into the science of the changing allergy landscape to deliver new, effective (and often drug-free) strategies so that you can actually enjoy this spring and summer.

what to do

- **Supercharge your diet.**

"Omega-3 fatty acids have been shown in animal studies to reduce bronchial inflammation and may even decrease the amount of mucus produced," notes Janis Jibrin, R.D., SELF contributing expert. She advises eating a serving of salmon or a handful of walnuts two to three times per week to see if it reduces symptoms. And quercetin, a flavonoid in arugula, kale, cilantro, okra, onions, radicchio and watercress, may help prevent immune cells from releasing histamine, potentially improving your symptoms and their severity.

- **Drink tea. Often.** EGCG, a powerful antioxidant in green tea, has been shown to block the body's release of histamine. In a new Japanese study, people who drank three cups daily of an EGCG-loaded tea for four months (before and during pollen season) experienced both fewer and milder symptoms. Choose the brewable kind: In tests, tea made from loose leaves or bags usually had higher levels of EGCG than bottled tea.

what to do better

- **Pinpoint your triggers.** Get personalized intel on the best (and worst) days to go on a picnic or a run. First, figure out which specific pollen sets you off by seeing an allergist (find one at ACAAI.org), who will do a simple 20-minute skin-prick test. Armed with that info, follow pollen counts to determine when your allergen is high. We like the free pollen-level app available from the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology at Pollen.AAAAI.org.



- **Be type A about cleaning.** After you've been outside for even a short time during a heavy pollen season, your clothes, body and hair may carry a crazy amount of allergens back into your home: In 24 hours, one large T-shirt can trap up to 7 million grains, researchers from Providence College found. Throw your clothes in the hamper as soon as you get home so you can wash them ASAP. "And take your shower at night," advises Marjorie Slankard, M.D., director of the allergy clinic at NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia.

- **Find your med.** You might be tempted to grab the antiallergy capsules that cover a million symptoms so you can blitz your suffering away, but it's best to take as little as you can

and target what's making you most miserable. Overmedicating can backfire by irritating your nasal passages and making you feel worse. "Antihistamines can help a runny nose and itchy eyes, but if you're stuffed up, opt for a decongestant," says Jennifer A. Reinhold, Pharm.D., assistant professor of clinical pharmacy at the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy.

what to watch

- **Cross-reacting allergens** Some foods share properties with common allergens and can set off minor reactions in some people any time of year. So if you get an itchy mouth or throat out of season, try skipping certain foods (or, if you can, cooking them). If you react to ragweed, for example, you could be bothered by cantaloupe, zucchini, cucumbers, bananas and chamomile tea; if birch tree pollen makes you sneeze, be wary of carrots, celery, parsley, fennel, hazelnuts, almonds, apples and stone fruit. If grass is your poison, you might be sensitive to peaches, melon, oranges, celery and tomatoes. Plus, be cautious with foods that may contain pollen. Sunflower seeds and unprocessed honey could trigger symptoms.

- **Synthetic clothes** "When synthetic fabrics such as nylon and polyester rub against each other, they can generate static electric charges that can cause more pollen to stick to your clothes, making your symptoms worse," says Gailen D. Marshall, M.D., director of clinical immunology at The University of Mississippi Medical Center in Jackson. To avoid becoming an allergen magnet when exercising outdoors, make sure your base (or only) layer is a natural fiber, such as cotton.

- **Your stress level** According to the AAFA, increases in stress can worsen inflammation, which could make allergy symptoms more severe. Some stress-reduction techniques, such as meditation and yoga, may help reduce inflammation. So get out your yoga mat to clear your head—in more ways than one. ■