

Allergy Free

Addressing Allergies from an Ayurvedic Perspective



Do you suffer from allergies in any way? Perhaps you've come to dread the arrival of springtime because of the degree to which your allergies overtake your life. Unfortunately, many of us feel utterly helpless when it comes to changing our allergy experience in any real or meaningful way. But because they so commonly flare up at this time of year, spring is an especially poignant time to explore the Ayurvedic approach to allergies—which, thankfully, offers a unique perspective and a number of effective allergy remedies for springtime and beyond. We sincerely hope that these insights will help you and your loved ones find some much-deserved allergy relief.

According to *Ayurveda*, an allergy is the result of a particular substance (the allergen) aggravating a specific *dosha*: *vata*, *pitta*, or *kapha*. Ayurveda therefore classifies allergies according to dosha, depending on which one(s) are triggered in each individual case. And yes, it's possible for more than one dosha to be involved. More often than not, allergic reactions are reflective of our constitutions. In other words, a pitta-predominant individual is more likely to develop a pitta type of allergy while a kapha-predominant individual is more likely to suffer from a kapha type of allergy. This is especially true when our predominant doshas are aggravated. However, it is also possible to develop allergies that do not correlate with our constitutions. For instance, a vata-predominant person with elevated pitta, might manifest a purely pitta type of allergy. Whatever the case, let's start by differentiating the three types of allergies identified in the Ayurvedic tradition.



Allergies and the Three Doshas

Below, you will find a description of allergies according to dosha: vata-type, pitta-type, and kapha-type—each with a brief exploration of the classic symptoms, potentially aggravating foods, and a short list of dosha-specific remedies. This information provides an important foundation. But there is no need to feel bogged down by these details because, next, we'll look at a number of Ayurvedic tools that can reduce allergy symptoms—regardless of their origins.

Vata-Type Allergies

Vata types of allergies are often experienced in the digestive tract with symptoms such as burping, bloating, digestive discomfort, gas, gurgling intestines, vague abdominal pain, and intestinal colic. They can also include symptoms of constriction such as wheezing or headache, as well as sneezing, ringing in the ears, joint pain, sciatica, muscle twitching or spasms, insomnia, nightmares, and other vata-type discomforts.¹

Possible Correlation with Vata-Aggravating Foods

Vata imbalances can cause food sensitivities to raw foods, many beans (black beans, pinto beans, adzuki beans, etc.), and certain animal proteins, like pork. These foods can also aggravate vata types of allergies.

Balancing Vata

When vata is aggravated, it is important to slow down, keep warm, stay hydrated, and eat a [vata-pacifying diet](#). Vata types of allergies are often soothed by ginger or licorice teas with an added drop of [ghee](#) to counteract vata's dry quality. [Healthy Vata](#) and [Vata Digest](#) can also be supportive. Because the seat of vata is in the colon, one very effective therapy for balancing vata-type allergies is a [Dashamula](#) tea enema (*basti*).² This therapy is best learned from an experienced Ayurvedic practitioner.

Pitta-Type Allergies

Pitta types of allergies usually occur when the hot, sharp qualities of an allergen come in contact with the skin and then subsequently enter the bloodstream. Pitta-type allergies are therefore often skin-based reactions such as hives, rashes, itching, allergic dermatitis, eczema, and may also involve bloodshot eyes. In the GI tract, pitta allergies can cause heartburn, acid indigestion, stomach upset, nausea, or vomiting. Pitta-type allergies can also induce hot flashes.³

Possible Correlation with Pitta-Aggravating Foods

High pitta can cause food sensitivities or allergies to hot, spicy dishes, citrus fruits, sour fruits, tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant, and fermented foods. These foods can also aggravate pitta types of allergies.



Balancing Pitta

When pitta is high, it is best to keep cool, to avoid exercising at midday, and to eat a [pitta-pacifying diet](#). [Healthy Pitta](#) and [Pitta Digest](#) can also be supportive. Because pitta has such an affinity for the blood, purifying the blood is often tremendously helpful. Simply donating blood can pacify pitta in much the same way that traditional bloodletting does. Herbal formulas that specifically support the blood can also be very effective; try [Blood Cleanse](#) or a mixture of Manjistha and Neem: mix one part [Manjistha](#) with one part [Neem](#); take 1/2 teaspoon of the mixture in warm water three times per day, after meals.⁴

For the Skin

To balance and soothe the skin, try any of the following therapeutic strategies:

Fresh Cilantro Juice

Drinking cilantro juice cools and calms the entire system and promotes optimal health, comfort, temperature, and fluid balance in the skin. Simply place a handful of fresh cilantro in a blender with about 1/3 cup water and blend. Strain the pulp and drink the juice.⁵

Cilantro Pulp

Applying fresh cilantro pulp directly to the skin offers more localized soothing support and can be used in conjunction with cilantro juice. The pulp can be applied to the skin after it has been separated from the juice.⁶

Soothing Skin Balm

If your skin is craving a comforting balm, try massaging the affected area with [Soothing Skin Balm](#). This poignant combination of Ayurvedic herbs and oils cools, soothes, and hydrates the skin. It can be applied as needed to stimulate circulation, support detoxification, and to promote natural healing.

Neem Oil

Massaging the skin with [Neem Oil](#)—the most cooling of all Ayurvedic oils—delivers the powerful pitta-pacifying and immune-supportive properties of organic neem directly where you need it most. Neem Oil helps to relieve pitta's excess heat and oiliness, allowing the skin to reset and rejuvenate.

Guduchi

This herb, taken internally, is renowned for boosting the immune system while purifying the blood, kidneys, and liver. [Guduchi](#) is therefore also highly effective at cooling, calming, and soothing the skin.

Kapha-Type Allergies

Kapha type allergies are the most likely to be exacerbated during the spring season because of the onslaught of pollen-based allergens. Kapha allergy symptoms include irritation of the mucus membranes, hay fever, cold, congestion, cough, sinus infection, water retention, bronchial congestion, asthma, and even sleeping disorders.⁷ In the digestive tract, kapha types of allergies can create a certain heaviness in the stomach and sluggish digestion.



Possible Correlation with Kapha-Aggravating Foods

Elevated kapha can cause food sensitivities or allergies to dairy products like milk, yogurt and cheese, and also to wheat, cucumber, or watermelon. These foods are also likely to aggravate kapha types of allergies.

Balancing Kapha

When trying to balance kapha, it is best to keep warm and dry, to avoid daytime napping, to stay active, and to eat a [kapha-pacifying diet](#). Drinking lightening and clarifying teas such as ginger, cinnamon, cardamom, or clove can also help to liquefy, dry, and eliminate excess kapha.⁸ Using small amounts of local honey as a sweetener serves to cleanse the system of excess kapha but can also help to diminish sensitivity to local pollens. [Healthy Kapha](#) and [Kapha Digest](#) (the Ayurvedic formula, [Trikatu](#), in tablet form) can also be supportive. In addition, [Punarnava](#) very effectively clears excess kapha from the chest and stomach and promotes proper fluid balance in the tissues. As a digestive, punarnava simultaneously helps to restore strength to a sluggish digestive fire.

If you tend to struggle with springtime allergies in particular, a dietary cleanse at the junction between winter and spring can help to clear the stomach and lungs of the excess kapha that is usually at the root of kapha types of allergies. Throughout the rest of the spring, a weekly one-day fast—whether a total fast, a fruit or juice fast, or a mono-diet of kitchari—can help to keep kapha balanced.⁹ There are also more advanced Ayurvedic therapies (like *pancha karma*) that offer a powerful means of clearing accumulated kapha from the system; these are best done under the guidance of an Ayurvedic practitioner.

General Therapeutic Strategies for Allergies

While identifying the type of allergy you suffer from is an important first step, there are a number of treatment strategies that can be helpful no matter which dosha is at the root of your particular allergy. These therapies can complement any dosha-specific strategies you might be using and, because they are universal, often help to improve our baseline sense of wellness at the same time.

Avoid the Allergen

As obvious as it may seem, avoiding exposure to a particular allergen can give your body an important rest from the over-active immune response at the root of your allergy. If you're allergic to pollen, do your best to stay out of its way for a while. If you're allergic to cat dander, try to avoid all contact with felines for a bit. It can also be helpful to dress in cotton clothing (which is fantastically hypo-allergenic, especially if the fiber is organic and was produced free of pesticides). If possible, avoid contact with synthetic fibers like polyester or rayon.



Take Triphala

[Triphala](#) is a traditional Ayurvedic formula comprised of three fruits that is balancing for vata, pitta, and kapha. It is revered for its unique ability to gently cleanse and detoxify the digestive tract while replenishing, nourishing, and rejuvenating the tissues. As digestive strength is intricately linked to the immune response, clearing out and firing up the digestive capacity can be tremendously helpful. About half an hour before bed, take two [Triphala tablets](#) with a glass of warm water. Or, if you prefer a powder, steep 1/2-1 teaspoon [Triphala powder](#) in a cup of freshly boiled water for ten minutes. Cool and drink.

Prioritize Proper Food Combining

Again, because the digestive tract and immune function are so intricately linked, proper food combining can provide essential support by helping to improve digestive health, which in turn, can bolster immune health. Ayurveda outlines a number of foods that, while perhaps fine to eat separately, are incredibly taxing to digest in combination with one another. These include things like meat and dairy, milk and yogurt, beans and cheese. For a more complete understanding of how to approach this strategy, please see our resource on [proper food combining](#).

Follow a Dosha-Pacifying Diet

This will vary, depending on the dosha most prominently at play in your allergic response. If you have more kapha types of symptoms, follow a [kapha-pacifying diet](#). If pitta is the major player in your allergic response, follow a [pitta-pacifying diet](#). And if your symptoms point to vata types of allergies, follow a [vata-pacifying diet](#).

Undertake a Dietary Cleanse

Given the profound connection between digestion and immune function, stoking the digestive fire with a cleanse can be an incredibly powerful way to support the immune system and minimize the development of allergies. The basic premise of a cleanse is that our bodies are inherently intelligent; when we provide a break from the barrage of potentially harmful inputs, our bodies immediately allocate the extra energy to cleaning house—repairing and rejuvenating the system for optimal performance. A dietary cleanse can help to reset to the digestive system in much the same way that restarting a computer helps to eliminate glitches and idiosyncrasies that can interfere with routine functioning. Cleanses help to clear toxins, balance the doshas, and kindle a stronger digestive fire—all of which will support digestive health, proper immune function, and fewer allergies. Cleanses can be as simple as a half or full-day fast, a short juice cleanse, or a longer mono-diet of something like kitchari. Ayurveda offers a number of effective cleansing techniques. If you are intrigued and would like some guidance, please see our [Cleansing Department](#), where we outline several different types of cleanses.



Cleanse or Lubricate the Nasal Passages

Because the respiratory system is a common host to allergic symptoms, offering some direct support to the nasal passages can help to mitigate the impact of allergens on these delicate tissues. *Nasya* and *Neti Pot* both support clear breathing and a clear mind, but their effects are quite different. The descriptions below will help you to decide which one would be best for you. Or, you can experiment with both and decide which you like better. Because these therapies introduce somewhat opposing energies, they are best practiced separately. It may be that one is simply a better fit for you. But if you like them both, you can alternate by day, by season, or by symptom—according to what works best for your body.

Nasya

Nasya is the practice of applying an herbalized oil to the nasal passages to soothe these delicate tissues, promote unobstructed breathing, relieve accumulated stress, and support mental clarity—all while providing an important barrier against potentially disturbing allergens. Lubricating the nasal passages is also said to improve the quality of the voice and to strengthen vision. Our [Nasya Oil](#) is *tridoshic*. Nasya should not be performed by pregnant or menstruating women. If this practice is new to you, please watch our [short instructional video](#).

Nasal Rinse

Nasal Rinse, or neti pot, is the practice of pouring warm salt water through the nasal passages. It moistens the mucus membranes and cleanses the nasal passages of dust, dirt, pollen, other allergens, and excess mucus. Our ceramic [Nasal Rinse Cup](#) is perfect for this practice. If you find that your nasal passages feel dry afterwards, or if you want to create a barrier against potential allergens, you can use your pinky finger to lubricate the nostrils with a bit of [sesame oil](#) or [ghee](#)—either immediately after neti pot, or at another time of day. If using a neti pot is new to you, please watch our [short instructional video](#).

Gargle with Supportive Liquids

If the throat is aggravated, gargling with either a bit of honey in hot water or with a mix of 1 cup hot water with 1 teaspoon [Turmeric powder](#), and 1 teaspoon [Natural Mineral Salt](#) can be both clarifying and soothing.¹⁰

Apply Neem Oil to Sensitive Skin

If the skin is sensitive or prone to allergic reactions, applying [Neem Oil](#) ahead of exposure to potential seasonal or environmental allergens can create a protective barrier against them and help to prevent contact with the allergen in the first place.¹¹ The neem oil cools, soothes, and desensitizes the skin while insulating it from potentially harmful external influences.



Meditate to Reduce Stress

Most allergies can be linked to stress.¹² Ayurveda recognizes the power of a number of subtle therapies that can help to reduce the detrimental impacts of stress on the physiology. Meditation is a very effective technique; it helps to minimize our experience of stress and also encourages the development of more constructive responses to stressful situations. Even ten to fifteen minutes of daily meditation can have a profound impact on your state of mind. If you do not already have a meditation practice, **Empty Bowl Meditation**, as taught by Dr. Vasant Lad, is a simple but powerful practice appropriate for most anyone.

Devote a Few Minutes Each Day to Pranayama

Pranayama is the practice of working with the breath to affect both gross and subtle aspects of the mind-body organism. Like meditation, pranayama supports balance in the nervous system, begins to unwind the cycle of chronic stress that can trigger allergies, and also helps to access and reset long-standing patterns in the energetic body. In addition, pranayama offers more specific support to the respiratory passages so often impacted by allergies. Here are a few breathing practices to consider:

Alternate Nostril Breathing

This practice, also known as **Nadi Shodhana**, is wonderful for reducing stress and supporting balance throughout the respiratory channels. It is especially useful when there is hay fever, wheezing, or sneezing.¹³

Ujjayi Breath

Ujjayi Pranayama activates the throat center and helps to balance the entire energetic body. It also offers powerful support to the immune system.

Bhastrika (Bellows Breath)

Bhastrika Pranayama is an invigorating practice that creates internal heat, helps to liquefy excess mucus, and generally clears obstructions from the respiratory system. It is particularly beneficial for congestive types of allergies.

Dr. Claudia Welch's Prana CD

This CD consists of four tracks—each a guided practice working with the prana body (*prana maya kosha*). The final track is a beautiful, hands-free version of alternate nostril breathing—a powerful tool for mitigating stress and supporting the subtle energies affecting the respiratory channels.



Practice Yoga

Yoga is another therapy that can help to reduce stress and balance the system overall. As a starting point, consider one of these flows:

Sun Salutations

Sun Salutations are warming, activating, invigorating, and also grounding. Because they encourage the development of internal heat, sun salutations are most appropriate for vata and kapha types of allergies.

Moon Salutations

Moon Salutations are cooling, soothing, grounding, and calming. Because they slow and cool the system, moon salutations are more appropriate for pitta types of allergies.

Additional Herbal Support

The following herbs and formulas are commonly used in allergic conditions to support the function of specific systems within the body. Choose according to where you need the most support.

- **Sitopaladi** supports the proper function of the respiratory system by removing excess vata, pitta, and kapha from the head and chest. Its strong affinity for the respiratory and digestive systems help this formula to support natural expectoration, healthy lungs, and clear respiration while bolstering the immune system. Taking this formula with 1/4 teaspoon of honey directs the herbs to more specifically support the lungs.¹⁴
- **Talisadi** includes all of the herbs in Sitopaladi, but it packs substantially more heat because of the addition of talisa, black pepper, and ginger. Talisadi offers all of the benefits of Sitopaladi with the added heat necessary to kindle a stronger digestive fire, and burn *ama* (natural toxins).
- **Trikatu** is a traditional Ayurvedic formula containing three herbs: black pepper, long pepper, and ginger. This combination is renowned for its ability to kindle *agni*, digest *ama* (natural toxins), support clear breathing, rejuvenate the lungs, balance mucus production, clear the mind, and support proper metabolism. This formula is traditionally mixed into raw honey to form a paste. Because it is quite heating, Trikatu is not the best choice when pitta is especially high and may not be appropriate during pregnancy.
- **Lung Formula** strengthens and rejuvenates the respiratory system by soothing the mucus membranes, supporting healthy expectoration, removing excess kapha from the lungs and sinuses, and promoting clear breathing. The licorice in the formula serves to simultaneously moisturize vata and liquefy kapha for optimal respiratory health.
- **Ashwagandha** is an adaptogen with a strong affinity for the nervous system, and helps to bolster the body's ability to resist stress, which is often involved in the allergic response. As an adaptogen, it also fosters optimal—but not overactive—immune function. In addition, Ashwagandha is very supportive of the lungs and the upper respiratory tract. It is balancing for both kapha and vata, and can be especially helpful when vata and kapha types of imbalances are at play.



- **Bibhitaki** is especially supportive of the mucous membranes throughout the body and also has a particular affinity for the upper body and the head. Its clearing and drying effects support clarity and health in the eyes, ears, nose, throat, and lungs (where it is especially adept at clearing the obstructing influence of excess kapha).
- **Haritaki** is wonderfully supportive of the digestive system and the lungs. It is a digestive and clears ama (natural toxins) while scraping accumulations from the tissues and channels of the body. In cases of vata-type dryness and constriction as well as kapha-type heaviness and moisture, Haritaki soothes the mucous membranes, throat, and respiratory tract.
- **Chyavanprash** is an herbal jam primarily aimed at supporting the immune system. It nourishes the mucous membranes, helps to balance mucous production, and benefits the lungs. Chyavanprash promotes strong digestion and metabolism, reduces ama (natural toxins), and supports the body's natural defenses.
- **Cumin, Coriander, and Fennel** tea kindles the digestive fire, and is particularly adept at clearing ama (natural toxins). To make this tea, use the whole seeds of **Cumin, Coriander** and **Fennel** in equal parts: about 1/3 teaspoon of each per cup of water. If you like it and intend to drink it regularly, you can mix equal parts of each seed ahead of time and store the mixed seeds in a small jar. When you are ready for some tea, simply use 1 teaspoon of the seed mixture per cup of water (or 1 tablespoon for every 3 cups of water). Bring your desired quantity of water and seeds to a boil, simmer until the seeds begin to sink, then strain out the seeds, cool the tea slightly, and drink.

Many Paths, One Objective

One of the things that is most inspiring about Ayurveda is its ability to heal each individual—according to his or her particular needs. For every ailment, Ayurveda offers many effective treatment strategies. As we have seen, this is certainly the case with allergies. In truth, the symptom isn't the most important factor in determining the best therapies to pursue. The individual is. That means that you... YOU (and your particular constellation of constitution, imbalance, diet, lifestyle, etc.) are the most *critical* piece of information in determining which therapies would be most supportive in your individual case. This is why working with a trained Ayurvedic practitioner can be so immensely rewarding. But this aspect of Ayurveda is also an invitation for you in your own healing process. It is an opportunity to sit with your situation, to contemplate the many factors at play in your imbalance, and to explore—from that thoughtful place—which healing modalities are most likely to address and heal the root of your particular imbalances.

The options we've laid out for you above might feel overwhelming at first. But in reality, each of us has a different sweet spot—a unique entry point that, when accessed, will allow for deeper healing. For some, the opening for positive change lies in tweaking the diet. For others, it's just the right herb, a perfectly matched pranayama, a contemplative practice, or a combination of tools that creates an ideal space for healing. Ayurveda is not a quick-fix, silver bullet approach, but the tradition has stood the test of time for over five thousand years, and continues to help and inspire people around the world.



So while it may take a little effort to find your path toward balance—your unique avenue toward allergy relief—this is a powerful journey to be embarking on. For our part, we sincerely hope that we can support you along the way. Here's to a vibrant spring, some allergy relief, and a life marked by ever-improving health and wellness.



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