

Q Which of the following brands of nasal solution have you heard of? (Select all that apply.)

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6 Natural Allergy Remedies

These Herbal Cures Can Help You Survive Sneezin' Season

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★★★★★



Sniffle, cough, achoo! If the sounds of spring allergies have returned to your home, take heart. You don't have to let hay fever symptoms prevent you from enjoying fresh air and warm weather this year. Learn about 6 effective herbal cures that can help you breathe easier - even when buds are blooming and grass is as high as the pollen count...

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For millions of people, the first sign of spring is a runny nose, sneezing, coughing and itchy eyes.

That's the immune system overreacting to grass, tree and ragweed pollen, and producing inflammatory chemicals called histamines. In other words, hay fever.

Officially called "seasonal allergic rhinitis," hay fever symptoms affect one in five people, and can lead to problems as serious as asthma attacks or ear and sinus infections, according to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID).

Over-the-counter and prescription allergy remedies can help, but sometimes cause side effects of their own, says Honolulu naturopathic physician Laurie Steelsmith, N.D., author of *Natural Choices for Women's Health* (Three Rivers Press).

"They speed you up, slow you down, make your head feel fuzzy, dehydrate your sinus membranes and give you cotton mouth," she says.

That's one reason to consider adding herbal cures to your anti-allergy war chest. They can be gentler and reduce hay fever symptoms with fewer side effects, Steelsmith says.

To be on the safe side, "if you're pregnant or breastfeeding, don't take any herb unless prescribed by your doctor," says Los Angeles otolaryngologist (ear, nose and throat specialist) Murray G. Grossan, M.D., who specializes in natural care for sinusitis and allergies.

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Here are 6 effective natural allergy remedies that may help curb your sniffing and sneezing:

1. Stinging nettle

Gardeners may consider stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*) a pesky weed, but the mineral-rich green plant is one of the best herbal cures for runny nose and itching eyes.

Because its active ingredient, scopoletin, is a natural antihistamine, nettle extract helps prevent hay fever symptoms such as sneezing, nasal congestion and itchy, watery eyes, according to a 2009 University of Miami study published in *Phytotherapy Research*.

"The beauty of this herb is that it doesn't speed you up or dial you down," Steelsmith says. "You feel normal on it, but the antihistamine effect is great."

How to take it: "I recommend freeze-dried nettle in capsule form," Steelsmith says. "Take two 300-milligram (mg) capsules, 3-4 times daily."

You can also brew 2-3 teaspoons of dried leaves in a pint of hot water to make nettle tea.

Watch out: Don't pick it yourself. As the name implies, the plant has tiny thorns that sting and cause a nasty rash.

2. Butterbur

An herb from the daisy family, butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*) is one of the most time-tested European allergy remedies. It's been used since the 17th century to stop coughs and treat upper-respiratory symptoms.

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In several separate studies, the herb proved as effective as antihistamines in relieving allergies, but without the drowsiness those drugs sometimes cause.

For example, butterbur reduced hay fever symptoms as well as a prescription antihistamine (and significantly better than a placebo) in a 2005 German study published in *Phytotherapy Research*.

"Human studies suggest that there is good scientific evidence to support the use of butterbur for the prevention of allergic rhinitis," a 2009 report by the National Toxicology Program of the National Institutes of Health stated.

How to take it: One 50 mg-75 mg capsule, normally taken twice daily, according to the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center.

Watch out: Be sure to take butterbur as an extract with no "pyrrolizidine alkaloids," a possibly toxic and carcinogenic compound in the plant itself.

3. Bromelain

This enzyme found in pineapples is a powerful anti-inflammatory that relieves swelling (especially in the nose and sinuses) and aching joints.

It also appears to thin nasal secretions, according to a 2006 research survey in *Alternative Medicine Review*.

How to take it: Unfortunately, the amount of bromelain in a slice of pineapple or a glass of juice isn't enough for an allergy cure. Take 80 mg-320 mg by capsule, 2-3 times per day.

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Watch out: Bromelain might increase the risk of bleeding during and after surgery, warns the NIH. Don't take it if you also take antibiotics like amoxicillin and tetracycline, or medications that slow blood clotting, because the enzyme could increase those drugs' effects and side effects. And if you're allergic to pineapples, you may be allergic to bromelain.

4. Quercetin

A natural antioxidant, antideongestant and antihistamine, quercetin is found in fruits (such as apples, red grapes and grapefruit) and vegetables (such as onions) and other plant-based foods (such as tea). It helps stop the body's immune cells from releasing histamines, the inflammatory chemicals that cause allergy symptoms.

"Quercetin is my favorite of the herbal allergy remedies," says Melissa Josselson, N.D., director of the Wellness Institute at Vir Tu (part of the Virtua health care system) in Sewell, N.J.

How to take it: "Eating foods high in quercetin help with hay fever symptoms, but a quercetin supplement is recommended to get the dose you'd need," Josselson says.

She suggests a 500 mg capsule 3 times a day, on an empty stomach "for maximum absorption."

Watch out: Talk to your doctor before taking quercetin if you're on anticoagulants (blood thinners, such as warfarin or aspirin), chemotherapy, corticosteroids or cyclosporine, sometimes prescribed for rheumatoid arthritis or psoriasis.

5. Vitamin C

A natural immune-system booster, vitamin C (ascorbic acid) has the additional benefit of acting as a mild antihistamine.

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"It helps stabilize the cell membranes of mast cells, which release histamine," Steelsmith says.

Histamine levels were significantly reduced when blood levels of vitamin C rose, according to 1990s research on allergy remedies at Arizona State University.

How to take it: For hay fever symptoms, take 1,000 mg with bioflavonoids (related healthful compounds, often from citrus fruit). Steelsmith suggests you look for the buffered form, which protects your stomach from possible irritation.

"It's easier on the digestion than pure ascorbic acid," she says.

Watch out: Vitamin C is considered safe in recommended dosages, but "dental erosion may occur from chronically chewing vitamin-C tablets," according to the Mayo Clinic. High doses of vitamin C (more than 2,000 mg per day) can cause diarrhea, nausea and upset stomach.

"People with acute or chronic diarrhea should avoid taking it, and those with gastritis or an ulcer should take the buffered form," Steelsmith says.

6. Eucalyptus

This sharply fragrant leaf (*Eucalyptus globulus*) "thins mucus and is excellent for a deep, heavy cough," Grossan says.

How to take it: Eucalyptus is found in a variety of forms, so choose your favorite allergy cure: lozenge, cough syrups, tea, steam, salves or ointments.

Or add up to five drops of eucalyptus oil in a vaporizer (or some boiling water) and take a few whiffs.

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Watch out: Don't give cough drops containing eucalyptus to children under 6, says the University of Maryland Medical Center. Talk to your doctor if you take 5-Fluorouracil (5-FU), pentobarbital or amphetamines (such as some ADHD medications), as eucalyptus may interact with these drugs.

What's Your Allergy IQ?

Ignorance may be bliss, but not when it comes to a stuffy, sneezy, scratchy problem like allergies. Do you know what's making you itch? Find out with this [allergy quiz](#).

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