

Recipes



Part of the treatment for allergies is to make sure you're getting plenty of foods that are rich in natural antihistamines such as beta carotene, vitamin C, quercetin and rutin. But you don't have to have hay fever to try these delicious recipes.

Wild garlic pesto

100 g wild garlic leaves
50 g spring onions
50 g almonds
10 g pumpkin seeds
100 ml olive oil
50 ml sunflower oil

A great recipe for the months when the woods are full of wild garlic. Roughly chop all the ingredients and put them in a food blender. Blend for a few seconds before adding the oil and continue to blend until smooth. This will keep for 4 to 5 days in the fridge or for months if frozen.

Parsley dressing

1 tsp. mustard
3 tbsp. white vinegar
2 tbsp. olive oil
2 tbsp. fresh parsley
½ squeezed lemon

Chop the parsley and add the other ingredients. Stir or shake to mix the ingredients, or whiz in a blender for a really smooth, creamy green sauce. Can be used to dress salads or roasted vegetables, or try drizzling over sliced ripe tomatoes.

Crunchy nut salad with chickpeas

1 tin chickpeas, rinsed
1 handful red cabbage, finely chopped
1 red onion, thinly sliced
1 medium carrot, coarsely grated
1 yellow pepper, sliced
1 handful rocket

1 handful parsley, chopped
2 tbsp. roughly chopped almonds or walnuts
10 pumpkin seeds
1 tbsp. crème fraîche (optional)
½ tsp. of mustard

Put the chickpeas, red cabbage, red onion, pepper, carrot, almonds/walnuts, pumpkin seeds, apple, rocket and parsley into a large bowl. Add the crème fraîche and mustard and stir well.

Serves 2

Carrot and watercress soup

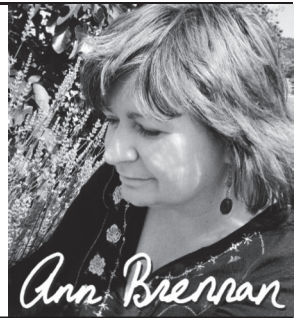
1 small onion, chopped
250 g carrots, chopped
1 bunch fresh watercress
1 tin chickpeas, rinsed
750 ml vegetable stock
1 tsp. ground cumin

Gently heat a tablespoon of olive oil in a medium sized saucepan and soften the onion. Add the chopped carrots and soften for five minutes. Chop the watercress straight into the pan, including stalks. Stir well, then add the chickpeas, stock and cumin and simmer gently for 20 minutes or so until the carrots are just cooked. Blend the soup in a processor until smooth, season with freshly ground black pepper to taste and serve.

Serves 2

WORDS *on* health

free



Hay fever What's the alternative?

A medical herbalist's approach to treating allergies and hay fever.

The conventional way of treating most chronic allergic conditions, hay fever being one of them, is to use drugs that switch things off.

A good example of this is the use of antihistamines and steroid nasal sprays which either block the immune response (antihistamines) or in more severe cases suppress immune function (steroids). Suppressing the symptoms is one way of managing hay fever, but as soon as the medicine wears off, the hay fever returns.

Years of treating chronic conditions using herbs and nutrition has taught me another way to view the whole problem, one which leads to a completely different approach to treatment.

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In the case of hay fever I look at the tissues causing the most problems: the mucous membranes, part of a system which both protects and eliminates. One of the primary functions of a healthy membrane in the respiratory tract is to secrete protective mucus to wash out dust, pollen, bacteria and other foreign matter. If the membranes become overloaded with waste products, they can't function, become inflamed and the misery of hay fever soon follows.

But why is this system having such an over-reaction to pollen that it triggers a big immune response? I don't want to switch off the functions of the mucous membranes – their role is too important. But I do want to 'turn down the volume' of the response and find out why they can't cope.

Very little happens in isolation in the body. All the cells, tissues and organs work together to maintain constant and stable conditions, a process known as homeostasis. When one part is weakened, damaged or overloaded then another system has to compensate and restore some sort of balance.

Your body has a number of ways to eliminate waste products: the bowels, the kidneys, the skin, the lungs and the mucous membranes. If any of these are blocked or not working very well, the waste will build up and make extra work for the others. Your body will try to handle this for as long as it can, but eventually one or more of the other systems will become compromised, causing another seemingly unrelated ailment. Is that itching nose and raw throat the result of damaged mucous membranes, or are they just overloaded because they're doing another system's work?

So our health depends on all these systems working closely together. When there's a problem with, say, an over-reaction to pollen, or dust, or with a build-up of toxins, all the other systems that remove waste need to be examined. Is the bowel working properly, for instance? And if not, what's causing *that* to go wrong?

My task when treating hay fever has a number of stages. First I need to clean out the system and repair any damage caused by off-the-shelf medications (many who visit me have a long history of using them). Next I need to find which systems are not working as they should and return them to health – the wide-ranging effects of herbal medicine can not only heal damage but also tone and optimise the function of tissues and organs. And when balance is restored, some crucial changes to the diet can maintain this health and prevent recurrence. ■

Very little happens in isolation in the body. When one system is weakened or damaged, another has to compensate.

When I see people in my practice I often find when examining their diet that they have cut out a 'bad' food and replaced it with a substitute. But sometimes they replace it with something even more problematic. A good example of this is cutting out dairy products and replacing them with soya.

What is wrong with soya, I hear you ask! The soya that we consume today is for the most part not fermented. Soya must be fermented to be properly digested by humans. That means that if you eat soya at all you should stick to fermented soya products such as miso, tempeh, nattō, or a naturally fermented soya sauce (tamari).

In the West we consume huge quantities of soya. It makes a much higher proportion of our diet than is typical in Asia. The Japanese and Chinese eat on average 10 grams of soya per day – about two teaspoons. Now compare that to us in the West where its presence is widespread due to its inclusion in many processed foods (check the ingredients labels of the packets in your cupboard and see how common it is). Then there are the obvious unfermented soya substitutes such as soya milk, yogurt, margarine, bread, tofu and ice cream.

The side effects of eating unfermented soya are numerous (it can affect nutrient absorption and thyroid function) and range from weight gain, depression or constant fatigue to digestive problems such as stomach cramps or diarrhoea.

A little fermented soya is fine, but it is important not to create more problems than are solved. So I always advise making your diet as diverse as possible. I know how hard it can be for people to cut certain foods from their diet, so I always give quick and easy alternatives – most people can't maintain an exclusion diet for long. There are many ways to eat well.

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Hay Fever Balm

This softening beeswax balm will protect as well as soften the sensitive skin around your nose. Applying it around your nostrils will help to block dust and pollen.

I would suggest adding pure spearmint essential oil as it is a great decongestant and it has antiseptic and healing properties. If you don't have spearmint you can leave it out or use Olbas oil.

2 teaspoons beeswax (grated)

6 tablespoons almond oil (you could use olive oil)

4 drops spearmint essential oil

Add the beeswax and almond oil to a glass pyrex jug. Sit this jug in a pan of simmering water. Once they have all melted together, mix well. As the mixture starts to cool, stir in the spearmint oil.

Pour into small sterilised glass jars. Cover tightly and label.