

BREATH OF *fresh* AIR

SPRINGTIME MEANS DAISY CHAINS TO SOME, AND A BOX OF TISSUES AND RED-RAW EYES TO OTHERS. WE SHOW YOU HOW TO CREATE AN ALLERGY-FRIENDLY (AND ALL-ROUND HEALTHY) HOME FOR YOU AND YOUR LOVED ONES THIS MONTH.

There's nothing quite as uplifting as the soft kiss of a warm breeze carrying the sweet scent of wisteria. The aroma of new life as nature wakes from her winter sleep is intoxicating. Yet for allergy sufferers, the olfactory hallmarks of spring can be a daily encumbrance. The most common spring allergy, hay fever (medically known as allergic rhinitis), can seriously undermine wellbeing.

THAT IS THE CRUX OF THE ALLERGY ISSUE.

"An allergy is a reaction generated from the immune system responding to a substance that it believes to be threatening and causing an allergic reaction," says accredited practising nutritionist Tracie Connor (tracietalkshealth.com.au).

"There's a wide range of substances that cause allergic reactions, from foods to pollens to pet dander (dead skin cells and hair), and they're known as allergens. Because an allergic reaction is caused by a powerful immune response, it can be critical if left untreated. At worst, allergic reactions can cause anaphylaxis (airways closing) and can be fatal," says Connor.

An estimated three million Australians and New Zealanders suffer from allergies according to the Australasian Society

Allergy-Proof Your Zone

While no cure exists for allergies, they can be managed – starting with the home. Once you get a grasp on what seems to be the primary cause of your allergic reactions, you can prioritise changes that need to be made to your living space – ideally without breaking the bank!

WITH THE HELP OF OUR EXPERTS, WE'VE PULLED TOGETHER SOME DIY HOME-RENO TIPS AND TRICKS TO HELP CURB YOUR ALLERGY SYMPTOMS:

1 KEEP IT CLEAN: Dust mites and their allergenic faecal particles love the safety of carpeted living areas. If your home is carpeted, ensure you vacuum at least once a week to diminish dust mite numbers and their effects. Any floor coverings, curtains or bedding should be washable and cleaned weekly in hot water.

2 SLEEP SANCTUARY: Purchase allergy-friendly casings for mattresses and pillows in the bedroom to reduce your exposure to dust mite allergens. Ensure pillows and quilts are filled with synthetic or organic substances that are less likely to cause a reaction, rather than feathers or wool.

3 DRY IT OUT: Damp houses have higher mould content, which can lead to irritations for asthma sufferers. Clean windows regularly with an organic or natural spray, and wipe, removing any

mould or condensation. In spring, consider shutting windows to avoid airborne allergens and rely on air-conditioning. Help the anti-damp along with an air humidifier, designed to increase air flow and reduce humidity.

4 SOUND STORAGE: Store spare bedding, pillows and rugs in plastic airtight containers to protect from dust mites. Remove any clutter or knickknacks that may encourage dust.

5 FRESHLY FURNISHED: Opt for furniture that can be easily cleaned, such as leather, wood and plastic chairs and sofas rather than cottons or fabrics.

6 ON THE NOSE: Chemical-laden candles or air fresheners can cause discomfort for allergy sufferers, so opt for natural-based scents wherever possible.



ALLERGY-FRIENDLY KITCHEN

“Australia has the highest recorded rate of food allergies in the world and it’s a growing issue with more people diagnosed every year,” says Connor.

First point of call for any suspected allergy or intolerance should be your general practitioner according to Connor. Avoid Dr Google or any other form of self-diagnosis.

“The first tip would be to have a test or screening to determine what you’re allergic to. This will save you much time and energy with any guesswork,” she says.

“Once you know what you have reactions to, the best action is avoidance and to seek advice from a qualified health professional who can assist with treatments.”

FOOD ALLERGY INTEL

CONNOR DISHES SAGE ADVICE FOR DEALING WITH FOOD ALLERGIES

1 ORGANISE: The smallest trace of a food allergen can cause a reaction, so designate certain cooking equipment, plates and utensils to be used specifically for the preparation of allergy-free meals. Thoroughly clean your hands, utensils and kitchen surfaces before preparing meals.

2 EDUCATE: Learn to read and understand food labels and become familiar with the technical food terms and allergen names used on food packages. This includes understanding the different names for sugars, proteins, additives and preservatives. Don’t rely on your favourite Internet search engine: seek the advice of a qualified nutritionist or allergy expert.

3 HAVE THE CONVERSATION: It’s important to help family and friends understand the importance of avoiding your food allergen and that exposure can lead to a serious reaction. When eating out, notify the restaurant or café staff about your food allergy and ask for clarification about the ingredients and equipment they use to prepare certain meals.

of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCI), which indicates global warming for increasing the output of pollen from plants and elongation of what has traditionally been a finite spring allergy season.

Allergens enter the body through the nose, skin or mouth, causing the immune system to release antibodies in an attempt to protect itself. Part of the defensive mechanism involves the antibodies, and the cells they attach to, producing the substance histamine. It's the release of histamine that causes swelling and inflammation, wheezing, sinus symptoms and skin rashes common in spring.

RISK FACTOR

Science is yet to understand why particular people react to allergens when others do not – although studies have shown that you are more likely to develop allergies if someone else in your family also suffers from them.

“Due to the wide variety of allergens and intolerances and the increasing recorded numbers of allergies and intolerances each year, no final conclusion has been made,” says Connor.

“That said, there is firm evidence to suggest that good digestive health plays a key role in the prevention and treatment of allergies and intolerances.”

Dr Mary Wingo (marywingo.com) says emerging research suggests that the microbiome – a fancy term for the teams of microorganisms present in our gut, skin and other cavities – may play a role in increased allergy prevalence.

“We must keep in mind that the explosion of allergy-related disease is a new phenomenon, and is much less common than a hundred years ago,” says Wingo.

“The depletion of our microbiome populations are thought to be responsible for the increase in allergy-related diseases because they act as functional extensions of our immune and endocrine systems. So when these populations are depleted, we lose important biological functioning.”

HOME TRUTH

Protecting your microbiome starts at home according to Wingo. “If we wish to protect our microbiome, then we must create the causes and conditions needed to re-equilibrate lost function,” says Wingo.



“The closer we live our lives to what nature intended, the less of a chance we will be affected by allergic disease. So in essence, the answer is that of Henry David Thoreau: ‘simplify, simplify, simplify’. Less is actually more.”

Wingo suggests opting for cleaning products and personal hygiene products that are free from chemicals wherever possible.

“Overuse will wipe out any friendly microbes we have cultivated over hundreds of thousands of years,” she says.

“The same goes with what we ingest. Remember that the processed food that we eat contains chemicals that were developed only recently – we just have not had time to evolve the sophisticated metabolic machinery to properly deal with novel substances and they tend to wipe out a lot of beneficial flora.”

Think a diet rich in organic wholefoods, and natural alternatives to the chemical cleaners, such as lemon and bi-carb soda.

For the inside word on food allergies, check out p. 86.



Sleep easy with this buckwheat husk pillow, made from organic cotton and hemp. It's breathable, washable and dust mite resistant – meaning less chance of irritated airways and a better night's rest. **Starting at \$90,** pureearthinternational.com



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This faux leather ottoman is cushioned for your sitting comfort while doubling as a storage case for your bedding and knickknacks so they don't collect dust. Two birds. **Ovela Ottoman & Storage Chest, \$69, kogon.com**



Synthetic interiors fragrances can irk sensitive respiratory systems. These chic reed diffusers from Tanda Modern are naturally perfumed with scents such as pomegranate and sage and are eco-friendly and vegan. \$34.95, tandamodern.com

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No flowers? No problem. Bring springtime indoors with bright and warming prints, minus the pollen. They are made to order and delivered Australia-wide within four weeks. **\$120, urbanroad.com.au**



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Allergy-proofing your in-house furnishings can still look chic. These soft leather cushions and storage tubs courtesy of Amigos De Hoy are a cinch to run a cloth over. **Visit amigosdehoy.com for pricing.**



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