



**MICHIGAN STATE
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Extension

Senior Health Line

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Allergic???

According to the Centers for Disease Control, allergies are the sixth leading cause of chronic illness in the United States with a cost exceeding \$18 billion each year. Anyone can develop allergies. Some babies are born allergic, some develop allergies over time and seniors who have never had an allergy in their life may develop hives after taking a new medication.

So what are allergies? They are an overreaction of the body's immune system to some type of substance that has entered the body. The substances are called allergens and they can cause a variety of reactions that range from annoying to life threatening. Some are seasonal and some can lead to chronic problems including sinus infections, asthma, gastrointestinal ulcers, or skin problems.

Allergies cannot be prevented but the reaction to it can be in many conditions. Once an allergen is identified, avoidance is important. If seasonal allergies are a problem, stay in air conditioned environments during peak allergy season. The best time to go outside is after a good, hard rain which brings the allergens to the ground. Be sure to shower before going to bed to rinse off any allergen that may be on you and launder your clothes after wearing them outside as pollen and other allergens stick to clothing. Keep the air inside clean by changing the filters on your furnace/air conditioner often and use high efficiency filters. Keep the air dry with a dehumidifier if air conditioning isn't available to reduce mold growth in your home. Also, don't forget to vacuum carpets often.

Medications that are often used to treat allergies can interact with other medications you may be taking. Discuss all medications you take with your doctor and or pharmacist. Besides drug

interactions, there are also problems with some medications that can help with allergy problems but have the potential to make other conditions worse. Such is the case with a type of medication that treats asthma called inhaled corticosteroids. These medications work well in controlling breathing problems associated with allergies but can contribute to osteoporosis, especially in post-menopausal women. Osteoporosis is a condition of brittle bones. Osteoporosis can lead to broken bones and difficulty in balance.

Allergic reactions for seniors commonly seen are allergic rhinitis which is exhibited by a runny nose, sneezing and hoarseness, allergic conjunctivitis or itchy, watery eyes and urticarial or hives. These symptoms are typically treated with antihistamines. Certain antihistamines can cause confusion, sedation, blurred vision, urinary retention and constipation. These symptoms can be exasperated if taken with some anti-depressant medications. Second and third generation antihistamines lead to less of these side effects and generally are effective in controlling symptoms.

Some allergies, especially food allergies can trigger gastrointestinal reactions. White blood cells called eosinophils may be released as a result of exposure to allergens. These white blood cells can cause inflammation and irritation to the lining of the gastrointestinal tract. If not treated, this can lead to bleeding and anemia.

Anaphylaxis is the most severe allergic reaction. Symptoms of anaphylaxis include feeling flushed, tingling in the hands, feet and or lips, becoming light headed, and tightening in the chest. If this is not treated immediately, this can progress to seizures, heart problems, shock and respiratory failure. Anaphylaxis is very serious and can lead to death.

Food, latex, insect stings and drug allergies can all result in anaphylaxis.

More research based information on allergies is available from the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Disease at <http://www.niaid.nih.gov/publications/allergies.htm>.

Swollen Feet

Retaining fluid in your feet can be uncomfortable, painful and even make it hard to move around. Certain health conditions can cause swelling in the feet and ankles although it isn't always clear why this swelling is associated with these health problems. Swelling, or edema, is when your body holds on to too much water. It is often visible in the feet, ankles, hands and fingers or even the face. Often times becomes worse if you are on a long airplane flight or if you are on your feet for a long period of time. It usually goes away without treatment but it can be a sign of a health problem like low blood protein levels, kidney disease, liver disease or heart failure.

A common cause for swelling in the foot or ankle is from injury. If you step wrong or twist your ankle, you may break a bone or tear tissues that connect to bone. This can lead to blood rushing to the area to help in the healing process. The area will then swell up. Seek medical advice if you cannot put weight on the foot or it does not look right.

Lymph nodes are glands which are part of your immune system. If they become damaged, your body may not be able to remove as much fluid as it needs to causing swelling in arms, legs and or feet. One treatment for this problem is called pneumatic compression. A sleeve is fit over the affected area and air is pumped in to move the fluid out of the area. Massage or compression stockings may also help this condition.

The kidneys work to filter waste products from the blood. If the kidneys are not working properly because of kidney damage, diabetes or high blood pressure among other things, too much sodium can be left in the blood. Sodium makes your body hold on to excess fluid. Gravity then pulls the water down to your feet and ankles causing swelling.

Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver. Inflammation or overconsumption of alcohol puts stress on the liver and can lead to the liver not working properly. If this happens, fluid can collect in

the feet, legs or the belly area.

Heart failure occurs when the heart does not pump blood efficiently. If your blood doesn't flow in the right direction, it can back up into your legs and feet. If you have heart failure and you are having a hard time catching your breath, get medical care immediately. Blood must get back to your heart from your extremities through your veins. Veins have valves that keep blood flowing in the right direction. These one way valves can get damaged and allow blood to flow back into your feet and ankles causing swelling.

RICE stands for rest, ice, compression and elevation. This is one way of treating swelling in the feet and ankles. It is most useful for injury but may help with other situations causing swelling also. Elevation helps with the gravity problem. Ice helps to narrow blood vessels, limiting blood flow and can also help with the pain. Compression through a wrap or compression stockings or sleeves can help push fluid away from the feet. If there isn't injury, walking every hour makes it harder for blood to pool in the feet and helps to keep blood flowing throughout the body.

Seek medical advice if your feet are swollen and you are having shortness of breath or chest pain. This can be a symptom of a blood clot. Also seek medical care if your skin looks stretched or breaks where there is swelling, or if you have pain from the swelling that does not go away or gets worse over time.

Saltless Seasoning Salt

- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ¼ teaspoon powdered thyme
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ¼ tsp ground celery seed
- ½ teaspoon white pepper
- ½ tsp dry mustard

Mix everything together and store in a closed container in a dry place. Use in place of salt on everything from salads to vegetable to meats, poultry and fish.

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