



# Exercise vs. Allergies

## All the Right Moves

by Marlaina Donato

Seasonal allergies plague more than 26 million Americans, according to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, with numbers on the rise in recent years. This is due in part to a dramatic increase in the amount of airborne pollen, a possible byproduct of climate change. Environmental and lifestyle stress, inadequate nutrition and weakened immune systems are also factors, leaving many feeling too miserable to engage in physical activities.

Yet, research shows that exercise can help ease allergy symptoms and lessen severity. A survey of 2,000 allergy sufferers sponsored by the UK National Pollen and Aerobiology Research Unit showed those that exercised the most had the mildest symptoms.

### More Exercise, Less Discomfort

Boosting heart rate through aerobic activities such as running, walking, jumping

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~Stephanie Mansour, fitness expert

rope, treadmill routines, tennis and team sports like volleyball or basketball seems to offer anti-allergy benefits. Vitamin C can also help. Researchers from the Faculty of Sports Science at Chulalongkorn University, in Bangkok, Thailand, found that 70 percent of participants that took a vitamin C supplement and ran for

half an hour experienced decreased nasal congestion and sneezing.

“Exercising regularly creates a cumulative effect in the body, helps speed up metabolism and improves immunity, so you could find even less allergies occurring over time,” says Stephanie Mansour, fitness expert and former allergy sufferer from Chicago. “I used to get allergy shots for a runny nose and headaches during certain times of the year, but personally transformed my allergies through expanding my lungs and chest and balancing out my nervous system.”

The American Academy of Otolaryngic Allergy recommends gentler forms of exercise, and cautions against vigorous

workouts such as Crossfit or long runs that can be counterproductive and exacerbate allergy flare-ups. Mansour recommends yoga, Pilates, walking or weight training—especially when congestion is a factor.

### Try Some Yoga

Mansour, a certified yoga instructor, attests to the benefits of the practice. To ease the symptoms of allergies, she recommends yoga both for its physical effects and its breath benefits. “Yoga can also help bring equilibrium to the nervous system and help the body relax. When the body is in a healthy balance and relaxed, it’s more effective at warding off things like infection or allergies.”

Registered nurse and yoga instructor Kristin Brien, of New York City, concurs. “A yoga practice trains and strengthens the vagal nerve, which activates the parasympathetic nervous system—rest and digest mode—and turns off the inflammatory response,” Brien says. “When we are under chronic stress, our nervous systems react as though our bodies are under constant threat, thus making some of us more susceptible to hypersensitive reactions to offending seasonal antigens like pollen and ragweed.”

Yoga practitioners across the board recommend inverted poses such as the plow, shoulder stand and downward facing dog to relieve allergy-related congestion. While yoga can be beneficial, inverted poses should be avoided by anyone with high blood pressure, glaucoma or retinal issues due to increased pressure in the blood vessels of the head, and some experts emphasize that allergy sufferers and asthmatics should avoid hot yoga and other demanding forms during flare-ups. A gentle approach goes a long way.

Ideally, Brien recommends asanas that anyone can do, including legs up the wall, supported bridge pose, supported reclined goddess pose and child’s pose.

### Warm-Up

No matter the type of exercise, warming up can play a key factor. According to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology, stretching before activity and boosting heart rate helps to maximize

exercise and its symptom-reducing effects.

## Create a Healthy Space

Lessening the body's burden by making small changes in living or workout space can also optimize the benefits of exercise.

Brien, an allergy sufferer and asthmatic, recommends using a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter to reduce circulating allergens and also wiping down all surfaces, including yoga mats, floors, window sills and vents. During drier, colder times of the year, Mansour recommends using a humidifier to add moisture to the air and improve breathing.

Exercise may not cure seasonal allergies, but it can lessen related symptoms, along with effecting a more balanced nervous system and better overall health.

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## Helpful Workout Tips



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### Before and After:

- Use a nasal saline spray beforehand.
- Change clothes and shower after outdoor exercise; wash workout clothing exposed to pollens.

### Consider Wearing:

- Wraparound sunglasses to avoid allergens getting into eyes
- A breathable mask to filter allergens during outdoor activity

### Avoid Exercising:

- In the morning when pollen and mold counts are highest
- When it's warm, dry or windy outside
- On busy roads where exhaust fumes can irritate bronchial and nasal passages
- When tired, sick or under significant stress; all three states prompt the immune system to react more severely to allergens

### Caution:

- Don't exercise for at least two hours after an allergy shot to avoid significant side effects.

## Reducing the Effect of Inflammation on Allergy Symptoms

by **Laura Kovalcik, DO**

As cold and snowy as the weather has been, spring will soon be upon us. Along with spring comes the budding trees and bushes, flowers and grass start to grow and they all release their pollens. Seasonal allergies, those that occur in the spring and fall, are very common and seem to be increasing. Many people experience sneezing, runny nose, itchy eyes and nasal congestion. These symptoms are caused in large part by an inflammatory molecule called histamine.

Histamine is made and stored in cells called mast cells and basophils, a type of white blood cell, found in large numbers in the nose, mouth and internal body surfaces. When allergens are breathed in or eaten and react with the mast cells they release their histamine causing symptoms.

An important aspect of decreasing allergy symptoms and discomfort is to

decrease overall body inflammation. Some of the causes of inflammation are stress, chemical sensitivities and food sensitivities. To lower the body's stress response it is important to get adequate sleep. Exercise has been found to be extremely helpful in reducing stress; also deep breathing and stretching routines. Some people de-stress by meditation, prayer or journaling. To decrease chemical sensitivities keep your personal spaces as chemical free as possible. Use more natural cleaning products such as baking soda and vinegar. Use unscented laundry products and personal care products. Scented products can cause respiratory symptoms in you and those around you. Food sensitivities are a source of many allergy symptoms. Testing for food sensitivities and then avoiding these foods will help reduce the worsening of allergy symptoms.

To decrease inflammation several products can be very useful. *X Lear* is a

nasal spray containing xylitol which leaves a sticky residue along the nasal tissue trapping pollen and other allergens preventing them from reaching the mast cells. Vitamin C and Quercetin can stabilize mast cells thereby limiting their ability to release histamine. Fish oil and Curcumin are oral anti-inflammatory products that can decrease systemic inflammation.

Also, if you currently take an antihistamine medication, know that there are natural alternatives available such as D-Hist and others. With all of these products start taking them at the first sign of symptoms to maximize their effectiveness.

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