

THE ALLERGY & ASTHMA CLINIC

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NEWSLETTER

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Does What You Eat Make Your Hay Fever Symptoms Worse?

For one in five Americans, springtime means the start of the sneezing, coughing and itching season. But for many with pollen allergies, there's even more to the story than what's in the air you breathe.

It turns out that the proteins in many plants, be they pollens or fruits and vegetables, have very similar molecular structures. Thus, when people are allergic to a particular pollen, their immune system often cross-reacts with the corresponding proteins in certain fruits and vegetables—their body mistakes one protein for the other. The result: What you eat can trigger allergy symptoms ranging from mild itching in the throat or swelling of the lips and mouth (called the oral allergy syndrome) to a full blown allergic reaction in which hives, difficulty breathing or even anaphylaxis can occur. And these cross reactions are not a rare occurrence.

Recently, MSNBC quoted Dr. Clifford W. Bassett, the vice chair of public education at the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology: "As many as one-third of the people with seasonal allergies experience oral allergy syndrome." That is, patients develop itching and irritation of the mouth and throat when they eat foods which cross react with their pollen allergies. One common protein is profilin and is the culprit in many food-based allergy attacks.

The body reacts to this substance just as if you had encountered pollen.

Unfortunately, food allergies can occur year round. Birch tree pollen cross reacts with many vegetables, fruits and nuts, including apples, carrots, celery, hazelnuts, and pears. The protein that creates the ragweed pollen problem is related to watermelon and chamomile—whether in tea or soaps and cosmetics. And grass pollen frequently cross reacts with many plants, such as cantaloupe and wheat.

So what's a fruit and veggie lover to do? Fortunately, heat frequently destroys the fruit and vegetable proteins that cause the allergic reaction—so sautéed rather than fresh tomatoes or applesauce rather than fresh apples often solves the problem. (But who wants cooked cantaloupe?) However, for those with severe food allergies to substances like peanut and seafood, cooking the food is not adequate and avoidance is the only proven way to prevent a reaction.

Allergy testing to foods can shed light on the situation and help identify those foods with the greatest potential to cause a problem. So if you're suspicious a food is making your allergies worse, contact our office so we can arrange a diagnostic test to help answer whether you

should modify your diet to improve your allergies.

And of course, the old stand by--antihistamines and nasal sprays--can help alleviate many of these allergy symptoms.

Also, allergy immunotherapy, whether given as injections or sublingual drops, often helps not only the immediate pollen allergy but also the related food problem as well. For ex: Many patients who take allergy immunotherapy for their pollen allergies find that not only do they sneeze and wheeze less, but the oral allergy syndrome symptoms which used to annoy them no longer cause a severe problem.

If you're concerned that what you're eating may be aggravating your allergies, don't despair and certainly don't give up the broccoli without good cause. Instead, contact us so we can help you evaluate your condition, and if a food allergy is present, help you come up with the best possible solution.

Leaving a Message for the Billing Department

We have discovered that if you call and are transferred to our billing dept., if the call goes to the machine you will be prompted to choose "1". When you do so, the system says you've used an invalid prompt. Wait a moment and the system will take your message. We're working on fixing this irritant. Thank you for your understanding.