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## Allergies and Adrenal Dysfunction

While the blooming trees and colorful flowers popping up this time of year are beautiful, the pollen is also out in full force and affecting millions of people who suffer from seasonal allergies. Many of us think of testing cortisol levels for those patients who present with fatigue or insomnia, but did you know your patients' allergic reactions may also have an adrenal component?

Allergies typically involve the release of histamine and other pro-inflammatory substances. Cortisol, one of the primary hormones produced by the adrenal glands, is a powerful anti-inflammatory agent. In fact, the amount of cortisol circulating in the blood is a key factor in controlling the level of inflammatory reactions in the body. When we have a minor injury or a muscle strain, our body's inflammatory cascade is initiated, leading to swelling and redness as commonly seen when an ankle is sprained or when an insect bite is acquired. This initial inflammation is a necessary to activate the immune system, however the immune reaction must be limited to prevent things like mosquito bites from enlarging or bronchial tubes and eyes from swelling shut due to allergies. Cortisol is secreted as part of an anti-inflammatory response. Its role is to govern the immune reaction and to remove and prevent excessive swelling and redness tissues. For this reason, proper adrenal function plays an important role in modulating and limiting allergies.

When adrenal function is less than optimal cortisol levels may not be adequate to counteract inflammatory reactions, allowing allergy symptoms to flourish unchecked. People suffering from suboptimal adrenal function may notice that they seem to have more allergies or their allergies seem to get worse. Conversely, when more histamine is released, it takes additional cortisol to control the inflammatory response, pushing the adrenal glands even harder. This additional stress perpetuates the already existing adrenal dysfunction and can result in a further decrease of cortisol production, allowing histamine to inflame the tissues more. This vicious cycle can lead to deepening adrenal dysfunction and an increased severity in allergic reactions.

It is not surprising that people with food and environmental allergies often have low or suboptimal cortisol levels. Eliminating or reducing exposure to foods and environmental substances that cause allergic or sensitivity reactions can help break this cycle and strengthen adrenal function. Likewise, supporting optimal adrenal function will treat allergic symptoms.

If your patient suffers from allergies and inflammatory reactions, test his/her diurnal cortisol secretion to see how the adrenal glands may be playing a role in their overall health.

## Resources

1. Wilson, James, ND, DC, PhD. *Adrenal Fatigue: The 21st Century Stress Syndrome*. Smart Publications: Petaluma, CA. pp 175, 269-270. 2001

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