

March 30, 2009

Your Good Health

## Make yourself spring-allergy-proof!

You don't need a calendar to know it's spring... if you're like 40 million Americans, your runny nose, itchy eyes and stuffy head have been telling you for weeks that the season's pollens have arrived! Taking medication helps, but dodging those troublemakers in the first place is even better! Here's how:

### 1 Build your defenses in the kitchen by:

#### ■ Snacking on red grapes

Their skins contain high levels of resveratrol, an all-natural anti-inflammatory. British researchers who studied the diet of children on the Greek island of Crete, where allergic rhinitis is a rare occurrence, found that the youngsters' habit of eating grapes daily played a major role in protecting them against wheezing and runny noses!

#### ■ Snacking on almonds

They're rich in magnesium, a mineral proven in recent studies to help the lungs function better and reduce the discomfort associated with asthma and allergies. Additional research reveals that having low levels of magnesium can raise your levels of histamine, a chemical your body produces during an allergic reaction. Other magnesium-rich foods include: cashews, peanuts and other nuts, pumpkin seeds, beans, whole grains, and fresh, canned or frozen dark-green vegetables like spinach.

### 2 Lock pollen out of your house by:

#### ■ Keeping windows shut

It's the best way to keep outdoor allergens from sneaking indoors, says Red Bank, NJ, allergist Andrew Hirsch, M.D. Stuffy inside, but still too cool to switch on the AC? Try running your heating system's fan to circulate and filter the air. (Likewise, keep your car windows closed and set the ventilation system to recirculate air rather than bring it in from the outside.)

**Tip** Time to get a new filter for your home heating and air conditioning system? Ask for one with a "MERV" rating between eight and 12. This means it can capture 70%-95% of the particles in the air, according to the American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology.

#### ■ Bathing before bed

Taking a shower and shampooing your hair before you go to sleep will wash away the day's accumulation of pollen, explains allergist James L. Sublett, M.D., clinical professor at the University of Louisville School of Medicine.

#### Personal protection!

To create an allergy relief plan just for you, log on to <http://www.allergyandasthmarelief.org/>



Surprise: Plants that flower or produce berries also produce very little irritating pollen!

### 3 Beat allergens in your laundry room by:

#### ■ Rinsing twice

Thinking of using wash water at a near-scalding temperature of 140°F to completely rid another top allergen—dust mites—from sheets, blankets and comforters? It's safer, less expensive and just as effective to simply rinse your load twice with cold water for about three minutes each cycle!

### 4 Take protective steps outdoors by:

#### ■ Planting the right plants

Certain common landscaping plants, like juniper and coyote bush, come in male and female varieties. The male plants pollinate the females by spreading pollen through the air, explains Thomas Leo Ogren, author of *Allergy-Free Gardening* ([allergy-free-gardening.com](http://allergy-free-gardening.com)). Ridding your garden of male plants will help keep your allergy symptoms in check, Ogren says. How can you tell the difference? "The females

produce berries or fruits of some kind," Ogren says. Even easier: Use the chart, "Plants that won't make you sneeze," below, to plan a sniffle-free garden.

—Bonnie Smolen

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