**Department of Extension Family and Consumer Sciences**

**Quarterly Newsletter**

**April 2014**

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**5 Things You Might Not Know About Spring Allergies**Sonja Koukel, PhD
Community & Environmental Health Specialist

Spring is finally rolling around the corner, and for most of us, that's a big relief. For many others, however, this revival of life also means the return of sneezing, coughing, wheezing, itching and other vexing symptoms of spring allergies, commonly known as hay fever. To help you better prepare for the allergy season and better enjoy a tear-free spring, here are five things you might not have known about spring allergies.

**1. Flowers are beautiful, abundant and probably not the cause of your allergies.**
Most springtime allergies are caused by tree pollen, not flowers. The most allergenic trees -- such as oak -- have small, or in the case of pine trees, no flowers. Trees that expend energy making beautiful flowers, rather than lots of pollen, know they will attract insects like bees to help them move the allergy-causing pollen from tree to tree.

Conversely, the allergenic trees need to produce a lot more pollen to better the chance that wind will blow their pollen to the next tree, to aid their process of reproduction. You can tell when a tree is pollinating by looking for catkins (slim, cylindrical flower clusters with indistinct or no petals) hanging off the branches. On a windy day, these pollen grains can travel up to 100 miles on a windy day.

 **2. You can develop spring allergies at any age, even if you didn't have them as a child.**
If your mild, cold-like symptoms continue unabated and are unaccompanied by a fever, it might not be a cold at all. Although many people first develop allergies during pre-adolescence, it is nevertheless quite common for people to develop their first spring time allergies post high school or even into their 30s and 40s. Sometimes a change in environment can cause allergies if you have recently moved from the city to the country or vice a versa.

**3. Spring allergies actually start in the winter.**
Although we commonly think of plants restarting their life cycle and pollinating around springtime -- and bringing with them the much dreaded allergy symptoms -- this process can actually start much earlier. This is because the trigger for plants to start pollinating is not only warming temperatures, but also the increasing length of sunlight during the day. Even as parts of the country still reel from below normal temperatures, the spring allergy season is already well under way.

In New Mexico, highly allergenic trees such as cedar, juniper, oak and ash have already begun to pollinate by end of February. However, cedar trees pollinate twice each year, beginning at the end of January and lasting till March and then again from September to October. Juniper trees pollinate from February thru April. Nearly all New Mexican's live in range of these pollens, which are such a large problem here, that you will find regular pollen counts on the nightly TV news. Recirculation of the old tree pollens on dry, windy spring days is a cause of continual problem for allergy sufferers thru June in most years.

New Mexico is the Nation’s second largest producer of pecans, behind Georgia and ahead of Texas. Pecan tree pollen is big problem for residents of the Southeastern part of the State. Other trees causing allergy problems for New Mexicans include elms and mulberries.

**4. If you're allergic to one tree, you're not necessarily allergic to them all.**
While there is always some cross-reactivity between tree pollens, being allergic to one does not mean you're allergic to them all. Trees pollinate in a more or less predictable pattern and knowing which ones you're not sensitive to can help decrease the amount of medication you use. The best way to find out which pollens triggers your allergies is to see an allergist and get tested.

**5. Eating local honey does not cure allergies.**
While honey is healthy, delicious and supports local farmers, it is a misnomer that eating local honey will prevent allergies to local pollens. Bees eat the pollen -- which contain the same amount of nutrients as a bean -- so not much pollen actually gets into the honey. The concentration of pollen spores present in the honey is low and nowhere near the amount that allergists will give the patient during immunotherapy or allergy shots. Immunotherapy allergy treatment will gradually "vaccinate" the body against allergens by introducing small and regulated amounts of the offensive pollen allergen.

Blooming plants does not need to mean blooming allergies. The more you know about your spring allergies, the better you can guard against the irritating symptoms. See your allergist to learn more about how to have a beautiful spring that is free of sneezing, itching, and wheezing.

Resources:
Mainardi, T. (March 27, 2014). HuffPost Healthy Living. Complete article available at <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-tim-mainardi-/spring-allergies_b_4959455.html>

New Mexico Allergy Society, <http://nmallergysociety.org/nmallergens.html>

**Preventing Food Recalls**

Nancy Flores, PhD

Food Technology Extension Specialist

with

David Marrufo

Over the past two years (2012, 2013) the Food and Drug Administration along with the US Department of Agriculture have recalled nearly 2,000 food products. The majority of these recalls were made by the FDA, while about 200 recalls were made by the USDA on meat, poultry or egg products. Despite the number of recalls being in the low thousands, these recalls affect millions of units of products each year.

The recalls are due in large part to only a few main reasons. The most common reason for these recalls has been undeclared allergens. Of the 316 food recalls made by the FDA in the first quarter of 2013, approximately 34 percent of these recalls were due to undeclared allergens. Undeclared allergen recalls can be the result of mislabeling as well as contamination. The next most common reason for food recalls in the past two years is contamination with pathogenic microbes such as Salmonella. Along with the next most common reasons for recalls, Listeria monocytogenes and E. coli, Salmonella accounted for nearly 25 percent of all food recalls. Lastly, foreign materials are one of the most common reasons for food recalls. In the first quarter of 2013 foreign material was the number one cause of food recalls reported by the USDA, of these recalls more than half were due to traces of plastic found in the food products (Stericycle ExpertRECALL). Overall food recalls affect a relatively small portion of all food products in the United States. However those products that are affected can cause harm if consumed.

The food industry can prevent recalls due to undeclared allergens in a few simple steps. First assure safety of ingredients by using approved sources and have these sources provide letters of guarantee for each ingredient. Review the source and letter of guarantee annually. Review batch sheets to assure that the current formulation has all the correct information. Review label for statement of ingredients and that known allergens, specifically the “big 8” are listed. Train employees to follow batch sheets and to check ingredients are correct before adding to batch. Additionally procedures must be in place to control allergens in the processing environment including storage and in-process product and complete sanitation during handling. Train employees so that they completely understand how and why certain materials and ingredients must be handled correctly is key to protect consumers.

Good Manufacturing Procedures or GMPs must be followed in all food processing facilities as per the 2009 US Food Code. These procedures are tools to reduce cross contamination with pathogenic bacteria and foreign materials. Foreign material contamination should be evaluated as each case arises and put control measures in place. For example if wood chips is a common material found in tomato sauce, then stop using wooden boxes during harvest or storage or use a specific inspection line to handle this situation. Bacterial contamination is more difficult to control; however, following good sanitation and hygienic practices is critical to reduce the chances of outbreaks. Reviewing GMP procedures with employees is easy way to maintain awareness and to reduce contamination.

**Not All Cooking Oils Are Equal**

Carol W. Turner, PhD

Food and Nutrition Specialist

When deciding what kind of oil to buy, consider three things 1) what it will

be used for, 2) how much it costs, and 3) nutrition. Below is a comparison of

commonly used oils. You’ll notice olive oil is more expensive than canola or

vegetable oil, but keep in mind that typically recipes call for small amounts

of olive oil so a bottle lasts a long time.

**Smoke Point:** Trying to find the healthiest cooking oil can be a daunting task.  You want to cook with an oil that has a high flash (smoke) point, but you also need to use a cooking oil that has a healthy balance of Omega 3 to Omega 6 fatty acids--and even better if the oil is loaded with antioxidants and vitamins!  Knowing the smoke point of an oil is important because heating oil to the point where the oil begins to smoke produces toxic fumes and harmful free radicals.  Check out our healthiest cooking oil comparison chart below to help alleviate the confusion!

**Flavor:** Sometimes, even if the smoke point is appropriate for your cooking method, certain oils shouldn’t be used because of how they will affect the flavor of the dish. Olive oil, for example, has a very strong, distinct taste that is not easy to cover up. This makes it great for dressings or for dipping bread, but not for dishes when you do not want to taste the oil.

For baking, you have to be even choosier. Since most baking is done at a relatively low temperature, the majority of oils have a high enough smoke point, but the flavor profile is more important. You want to use an oil that either compliments sweets or won’t affect their taste at all. Butter, shortening, canola oil, and extra virgin olive oil all work well for baking and they can make a pretty big difference in the texture, too.

**Considerations:**  for high temperature cooking, select cooking oils with a high smoke point.  For low temperature cooking, or adding to dishes and salad dressings, chose oils with a higher Omega-3 fatty acids since they promote healthy cells and decrease stroke and heart attack risk.  They are also known for their anti-inflammatory action.  Although you need Omega-6 fatty acids to maintain cell wall integrity and provide energy for the heart, too much Omega-6 fatty acids can increase inflammation in the body.  Also, cooking oils high in Omega 9 is a good way to go. Omega-9 fatty acids are considered to be "conditionally essential," which means that although your body produces them, they aren't produced in meaningful quantities. Consuming omega-9 fatty acids such as oleic acid lowers the risk of heart attacks, arteriosclerosis, and aids in cancer prevention.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Type of Oil | Uses | Cost\*\*\* | Unit price(per fl oz) | Smoke Point °F | Omega-6: Omega-3 Ratio(plus other relevant fat information) |
| **Canola**(48 fluid oz) | Sautéing, baking, frying, marinating | 3.59-4.59 | .07-.09 | 400°F | 2:1, 62% monounsaturated, 32% polyunsaturated |
| **Olive**(17 fl oz) | Grilling, sautéing, roasting, spreads for breads | 7.69-7.99 | .45-.47 | 320°F | 73% monounsaturated, high in Omega 9 |
| **Vegetable\***(48 fl oz) | Sautéing, baking, frying, marinating | 3.18-4.39 | .06-.09 |  |  |
| **Peanut**(24 fl oz) | Stir-frying, roasting, deep frying, baking | 3.58-4.98 | .15-.21 | 440°F | 32:1 |
| **Sesame\*\***(12.7 fl oz) | Stir-frying (light), dressings/sauces (dark) | 5.89-7.89 | .70-.62 | 410°F | 42:1 |

\*usually made from a combination of corn, soybeans, and/or sunflower seeds

\*\*there are light and dark versions of sesame oil

\*\*\*Costs were found at grocery stores in southern New Mexico

**Search in ~~Google~~ USA.GOV for Educational Materials**

Fahzy Abdul-Rahman, Ph.D., M.P.H.

Family Resource Management Specialist

A county agent requested for some educational materials on Credit:

*Do you know of any factsheets or PowerPoints in Spanish that focus specifically on credit? I’m going to \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\* on Wednesday and they requested information about credit. Let me know, thanks!*

Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation ([FDIC.GOV)](https://www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/overview.html) has some good materials in Spanish on credit issues but the materials have to be shipped. The FDIC resources that I have would not meet the agent's request the materials need to be shipped and would not make in three days. I could not find anything on FDIC site to be downloaded. The Federal Trade Commission ([FTC.GOV)](https://www.consumidor.ftc.gov/articulos/s0347-sus-derechos-de-igualdad-de-oportunidad-de-credito) also has good resources in Spanish, but no training materials in Spanish were available.

**…. But the Winner is …**

The BEST SEARCH ENGINE TOOL that I found to meet this demand was [USA.GOV](http://www.usa.gov). The Spanish educational material search is done on <http://www.usa.gov/gobiernousa/index.shtml>, obtained by clicking "Espanol" on [USA.GOV](http://www.usa.gov).

Image 1: Click “Espanol” on usa.gov page to Reach the Spanish Site

On the [www.usa.gov/gobiernousa](http://www.usa.gov/gobiernousa/index.shtml) site, search for the educational materials you are looking for. In my case, I searched for "Credit Card powerpoint", which produced resourceful results:

Image 1: Searching "Credit Card Powerpoint" in USA.GOV's Spanish Site

USA.GOV search results include those obtained from governmental agencies (federal, state, county, etc.) and universities. From my highly limited Spanish, the fifth content out of NY.GOV looks like what the agent wanted. Of course, more specific searches with Spanish words would be very helpful.

**Mind Your ~~Manners~~ Eating**

Cassandra Vanderpool, MS, RDN, LD

Extension Diabetes Coordinator

People with diabetes and all others who are trying to eat healthy know that deciding *what* to eat is important to overall wellness. However, deciding *how much* to eat is also key and can be more difficult to monitor. Ideally, everyone would begin eating when they experience early signs of hunger and stop eating when they are almost (about ⅔) full. Realistically, most people do not regularly eat based on their body’s hunger cues.

Many people are becoming more familiar with “mindful eating,” which involves paying full attention to the process of eating. It can improve eating behaviors, sensitivity to body cues, and satisfaction with meals. Still, many people struggle to practice mindful eating throughout the day, especially when tired or rushed. If you are frequently among them, perhaps you can approach the issue from the opposite end of the spectrum by avoiding the traps of “mindless eating.”

Mindless eating refers to eating based on environmental factors rather than hunger. By making some simple, inexpensive changes to your environment, you may reduce how much you eat without any extra effort. Here are a few of the findings from studies conducted by food psychologist Dr. Brian Wansink and co-researchers:

1. The size of your dishes affects how much you serve. Wansink and Ittersum have conducted multiple studies that show people serve larger portions when using large dishes (up to 77% more!) and smaller portions when using small dishes. This held true even when people were shown the desired serving size and educated about the effect that dish size tends to have on portion size. As for beverages, people tend to pour more into wide glasses than narrow ones.
2. The color of your dishes affects how much you serve. People also served larger portions when there was less contrast between the color of the food and the dish and smaller portions when there was more contrast. For example, people with red plates served themselves 30% more pasta in a red sauce than people with white plates.
3. The amount you serve, or are served, affects how much you eat. People eat over 90% of what they serve themselves, so it is no surprise that study participants who served themselves larger portions ate more food than those who served themselves less food. What about when you are away from home and others are doing the serving? In one of Wansink’s studies, movie goers ate 45% more popcorn when given an extra-large bucket than those who were given a large bucket. In another study, he provided free soup for participants in 22-ounce bowls. Some were normal bowls and others were designed to slowly refill as participants ate so they did not notice they were eating from a bottomless bowl of soup. Those with the bottomless bowls ate 76% more soup than those with the normal bowls.
4. The amount of effort required affects how much you eat. For example, secretaries ate 48% more candy when it was on their desk than when they had to walk six feet to get to it. Apple sales in schools increased 71% when the fruit was served sliced instead of whole, and 73% more students ate at least half of the apple.

These studies, along with many others, indicate that people rely a lot more on their eyes than their stomachs when deciding how much to eat. If you think you are an exception, you share that belief with the participants in these studies. Many of the studies asked participants to estimate how much they took and ate and found that people tend to think their portions are close to suggested serving sizes even when they differ significantly.

How can you use the findings from mindless eating studies to your advantage? Consider making some changes to your eating environment. People who made one change reported losing one to two pounds per month. While that may not sound like much, realize that many people slowly but steadily gain weight over time. Strategies that help people lose or even maintain weight can be beneficial. Plus, participants reduced their calorie intake without consciously trying to eat less! These are some ways that you might alter your environment based on mindless eating studies:

* If you have today’s standard dinner plates and deep bowls, consider using smaller ones. For example, use salad plates instead of dinner plates. Even when study participants were allowed to serve themselves multiple times, those who ate from smaller dishes ended up eating less than those using larger dishes.
* When possible, use dishes that provide high contrast to the foods being eaten.
* Avoid eating out of the package or containers that have multiple servings in them. Instead, put the amount you want to eat on a smaller dish.
* Increase the amount of water you pour and drink by using a wide glass. Limit caloric beverages, and use narrow glasses when you do have them.
* Make it more difficult to get to foods you want to eat less of and easier to get to healthy options. Here are a few ideas:
	+ You can enjoy any snack or treat you love occasionally, but some people find it easier to avoid over eating them if they have limited access to them. Try buying one small bag of snack foods instead of bulk sizes when purchasing groceries so they are less available in your home. Similarly, instead of buying a carton of ice cream, get an individual treat from a fast food or other restaurant when you really want one. You are likely to eat something less often if you have to drive and spend more money to get it.
	+ Place less healthy options out of eye sight and arm reach (e.g., on the top shelf, at the back of a low cupboard, definitely off the counter!). Place healthier options at eye level and within reach (e.g., keep a bowl of fruit on the table).
	+ Serve your food in the kitchen and then take your plate to the dining room to eat. While you may go back for seconds if you are still hungry, people tend to eat less when they have to walk to get more. You can make seconds even more inconvenient by plating your meal, putting the remaining food away, and then eating.
* Periodically measure portions with measuring cups or food scales to reinforce what recommended portion sizes look like on your dishes. This is especially important if you have diabetes.

Resources: The studies referred to in this article and many others on mindless eating are summarized and referenced on the Cornell University Food and Brand Lab website at <http://foodpsychology.cornell.edu>.