



## ALLERGIES *what are they?*

Allergies can develop at any age and are often inherited. They affect people throughout the year at any time, depending upon the local environment and the triggers that cause the problem. An allergic reaction occurs when a person's immune system attacks a foreign substance known as an antigen, (such as pollen or dust) that is harmless to the majority of people. This alerting is due to oversensitivity, developed over a period of time. When allergens react with the over produced antibodies, this catalyses the release of further chemicals, including histamine, that cause the allergic reaction and associated symptoms. This subsequently leads to inflammation, as surrounding tissues are destroyed along with the antigen. Every time the allergen is reintroduced in to the body, the immune system triggers the same defensive and inflated reaction.

### ALLERGIC CONDITIONS

Allergens, are introduced into the body in various ways which include breathing, ingestion, skin contact, through mucous membranes or by injection. Common reactions include asthma, eczema, hay fever, conjunctivitis, hives, congested and inflamed nasal passages and respiratory tract, dermatitis, sunburn, food allergies, reactions to insect stings and animal proteins like dander. Such conditions are triggered by the following allergens; pollen, mould, house dust mites, foods, cosmetics, animal hair, environmental conditions like temperature and light, poisonous plants, medicinal drugs and vaccines, insect spores and stings, bacteria, viruses, latex and metals.

When allergens enter the blood stream they mobilise and in so doing, can cause allergic symptoms in remote sites anywhere in the body; particularly the lungs, nose, skin, stomach and eyes. The ever increasing pace of life means that stress and pollution also play a key role in affecting our nervous and immune systems and how they deal with maintaining healthy equilibrium. Stress taxes the body, raising the pulse and blood pressure, releasing adrenaline and increasing tension within the connective tissues. We know this as the fight or flight response. Such conditions are not healthy when the body no longer knows how to switch off and replenish itself through the relaxation response.

### SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of allergy include inflammation, irritation, burning, stinging, sneezing, blisters, rashes and itchiness, skin discolouration, wheezing, coughing, shortness of breath, difficulty swallowing, pressure and pain, running, oozing, cramps, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, colitis and other gastrointestinal problems, anxiety, restlessness and confusion, fever, racing pulse, increased or decreased blood pressure, blurred vision, weakness, dizziness, fainting, organ system failure and life threatening shock. All of these symptoms are the body's means to protect itself. It is either attempting to remove the allergen or prevent more from entering.