



ASK THE EXPERTS

Three Alternative Ways to Alleviate Austin Allergies

by Karie Milewski
photos by Blue Firefly Photography

This is Austin: home to the Ann Richards Bridge Bats, Barton Springs and the worst allergies in America. In 2007, the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), crowned our city the No. 1 “most challenging place to live with fall allergies.” In fact, if you’ve lived here for at least a year, you’re now familiar with our seasons: Winter Cedar, Springtime Oak, Summer Grasses and the relentless Autumn Ragweed.

Despite our stream of sneezes, we couldn’t possibly live anywhere else. So, to survive in the “Allergy Capitol of the World,” we’ve brought in the help of three allergy specialists. Check out their advice and enjoy Austin allergy-free this summer!



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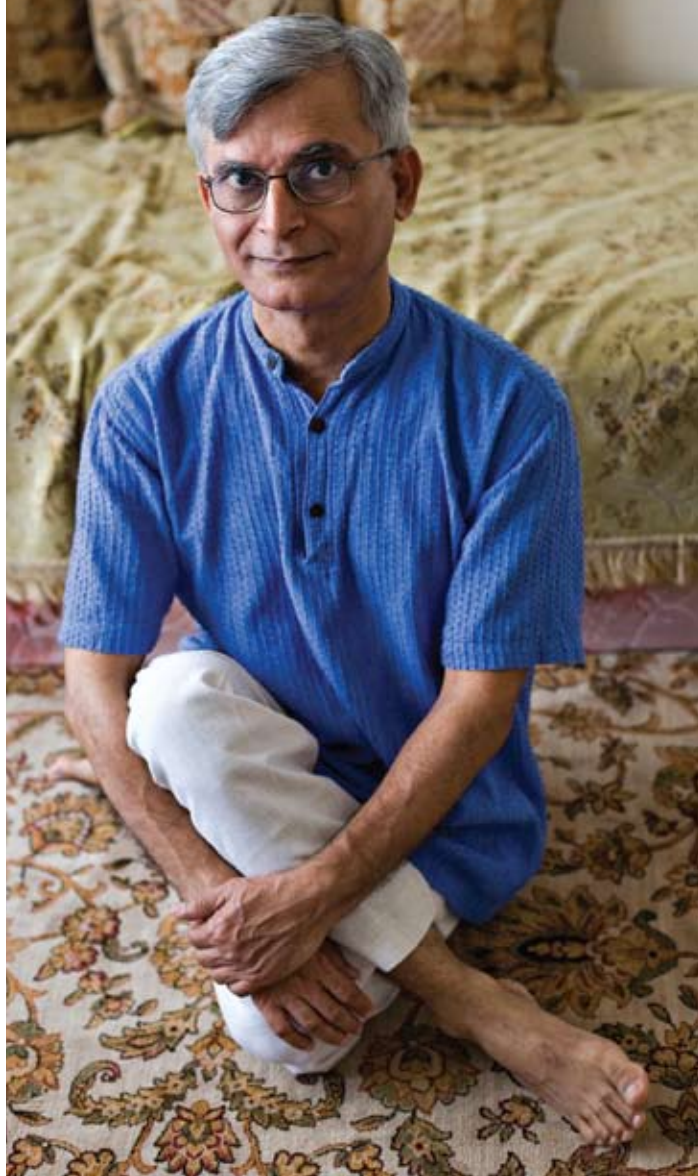
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Expert

Jogi Bhagat



The nose is your most important line of defense against allergies. It acts as a filter and to work efficiently, it must stay clean. Congested nasal passages can be relieved with the help of an ancient Indian practice that's inexpensive and side-effect free. Jala neti — Sanskrit for “nasal cleansing with water” — is a nasal irrigation technique that uses a simple device called a neti pot.

Fill the pot with lukewarm salt water, pour the solution into one nostril, gravity drains it out the other side, repeat on next nostril and instantly breathe through your nose!

Incorporate the neti pot into your morning routine and use it up to four times a day. You can pick up a neti-pot kit complete with saline packets at most Austin pharmacies for under \$15.

If your throat is the problem, conjure up one of these simple and soothing tonics. **Gargle:** Warm saltwater and honey. **Sip:** Hot ginger tea with honey. **Drink:** As often as needed.

Experience: Certified Yoga Instructor and Medicinal Yoga Therapist (medicinalyoga.com)

Yoga to the Rescue

Whether it's nasal allergies or respiratory difficulties, Yoga poses and breathing techniques help to open air passages and promote mucus drainage. Check out these revitalizing recommendations and pay attention to your body. *Remember: Always consult with your doctor before participating in any new physical activity program and only practice under a certified yoga instructor.*

1. Kapal Bhati (Skull Shining)

This is great for preventing mucous build-up

This vigorous breathing exercise consists of rapid and forceful exhalations. Contract your abdominal muscles with each quick breath. Your inhalations will automatically be passive. Start with two rounds of 15 repetitions and then gradually increase at your own

capacity. If you have high blood pressure, make sure to exhale gently and slow down your breath.

2. Nadi Shodhan (Alternate Nostril Breathing)

This is great for avoiding congestion

Sit in a meditative posture. Close the right nostril with your right thumb and exhale completely through the left nostril. Then inhale deeply through the same nostril. Release your thumb and close the left nostril with your ring and pinky finger. Exhale and inhale completely. Repeat this cycle nine times.

3. Surya Namaskar (Sun Salutation Poses)

This is great for warding off respiratory infections and reenergizing your body

This dynamic practice consists of 12 postures performed in a single, graceful flow. Each movement is coordinated with your breath: Inhale as you extend or stretch and exhale as you fold or contract. Repeat three times.

Consult the medication guide below and learn to navigate your way through the myriad of allergy treatments at your local pharmacy. Remember: Always discuss your symptoms with your doctor before taking any medication.

ANTIHISTAMINES

Antihistamines act just as their name implies; by blocking the action of the histamine on your body's tissues.

TRY: Clarinex (Desloratadine)

Potential side effects: Minimal, but may include dry mouth and drowsiness

TRY: Astepro Nasal Spray (Azelastine)

Potential side effects: Minimal, but may include drowsiness and headache.

DID YOU KNOW?

Antihistamines also work in the part of the brain that controls nausea and vomiting. That's why they're sometimes prescribed to alleviate motion sickness.

DECONGESTANTS

These narrow the blood vessels in the lining of your nose. As a result, swollen tissue inside the nose shrinks and air can pass through more easily.

TRY: Sudafed (Pseudoephedrine)

Potential side effects: The active ingredient can cause dizziness, nervousness, heart palpitations and has been known to raise blood pressure.

MUCOLYTICS

Mucolytic medications dissolve thick mucus to help relieve your respiratory difficulties.

TRY: Mucomyst (Acetylcysteine)

Potential side effects: Rare, but may include drowsiness and a runny nose.

CORTICOSTEROIDS

Corticosteroids work by reducing inflammatory reactions in the nasal airway in response to allergens and irritants in the air.

TRY: Nasonex (Mometasone)

Potential side effects: Very safe, even for the pediatric population. Since the medicine is minimally absorbed by the body, side effects are not common for most people.

LEUKOTRIENE INHIBITORS

These prevent an inflammatory response that results in symptoms like asthma and watery eyes.

TRY: Singulair (Montelukast)

Potential side effects: Minimal; include headache, drowsiness and upset stomach.

Expert

Dr. Daniel Slaughter



Experience: Ears, Nose and Throat Physician at the Nasal and Sinus Center of Austin (NSCAustin.com)

Staying Active with Allergies

According to Dr. Slaughter, allergen avoidance is always the key. For example, don't run outside in October if you suffer from ragweed. Now, this isn't always feasible, particularly if you're training for a race. So what can you do?

You can alleviate post-run asthma by turning on the air in your car and chugging your water bottle. Most allergy symptoms are localized to the nasal area, so keeping yourself hydrated will limit nasal passage inflammation and reinforce your natural defense

system. Then take a warm shower when you get home to rinse your allergens away. The humidity will soothe your upper airways and loosen up any mucus you couldn't clear during your jog.

If your sneezes multiply when you walk in your house, indoor allergies such as dust mites are most likely the culprit. Stick to a regular dusting schedule and you'll breathe easier. For instance, a home with a musty odor or black specks along the walls might indicate a mold problem. This alone could be the reason for your persistent cough and chest congestion. What's your best plan of action? Call a mold-removal expert; you'll be surprised how quickly indoor allergies disappear after the mold does.

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Experience: Executive Director of the American Botanical Council (herbalgram.org)

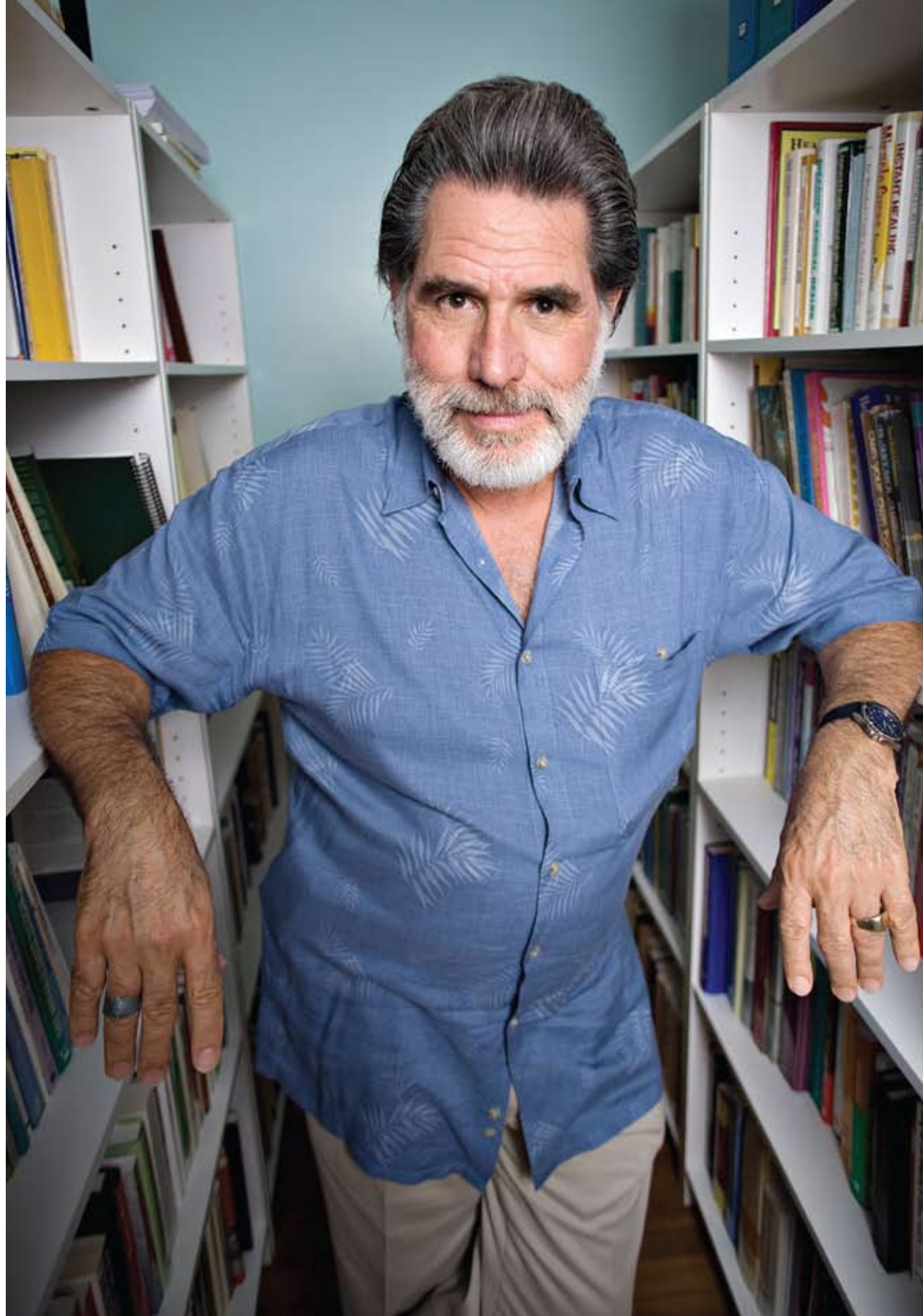
There are an increasing number of herbal supplements popping up on natural food store and pharmacy shelves these days. Despite the lack of FDA recognition of their potential benefits, many allergy sufferers swear by these herbal preparations. Pick up one of these potential remedies and stop worrying about the cedar levels.

Sinus sufferer

Several clinical trials have demonstrated that Sinupret, an herbal preparation, has effectively treated and prevented sinus infections associated with seasonal allergies. It has also been used as a remedy for other upper respiratory tract illnesses and even bronchitis. Although new on U.S. shelves, this herbal preparation has been a leading over-the-counter remedy in Germany for many years. Extracts of five European herbs including elder flowers, primrose flowers, common sorrel herb, European vervain herb, and gentian root make up this supplement. Pick up Sinupret at your local Austin drug store where you'll also find a special preparation designed for your young ones.

Relief that's golden

You're probably all too familiar with itchy, watery, red eyes during high pollen days. An old but effective remedy to provide temporary relief is goldenseal eyewash. Create your own mixture by simply adding 10 to 20 drops of non-alcoholic goldenseal root — also known as *Hydrastis canadensis* — extract to a small amount of clean water. The alkaloids in goldenseal root extract are responsible for the instant itching relief and work by



soothing the inflamed mucous membranes of the eye. In fact, this herb was once the main ingredient in the popular Murine eyewash many years ago.

Pop an herb: Freeze-dried nettles

Researchers at the National College of Naturopathic Medicine in Oregon found that 58 percent of 69 patients suffering from

hay fever reported moderate relief after taking freeze-dried nettle supplements. Freeze-drying preserves formic acid (an antihistamine without the side effects).