- Allergy

ASTHMA AND ALLERGIES

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The tendency to develop asthma and other allergies is genetic, but the condition itself is usually precipitated by environmental influences.

Factors which can adversely affect the development of the immune system in early childhood, such as excessive use of antibacterial cleaning products and frequent courses of antibiotics, may increase the risk of asthma and allergies in later life. Other triggering factors include anxiety, infection, pollution, frequent use of certain drugs such as paracetamol, poor diet, and excessive salt intake.

Asthma and allergy sufferers develop hypersensitivity of the respiratory system, which causes spasmodic constriction of the bronchi and production of excess mucus. This leads to a sense of constriction in the lungs with wheezing and coughing. Research has revealed that many people with asthma and allergies find it difficult to control their symptoms.

However with the right treatment it is possible to effectively control the symptoms. Medical herbalists take a holistic approach to treatment and provide individually tailored prescriptions, combining a number of different herbs.

For example, antispasmodic and broncho-dilating herbs help to reduce coughing and wheezing, anticatarrhal herbs deal with excess mucus production, while antimicrobial herbs such as thyme help to treat infections and reduce the need for antibiotics. Anti-allergy herbs are also helpful.

If you suffer from asthma or allergies, it is important to avoid the foods that commonly worsen allergic reactions, such as preserved meats, tomatoes, red-skinned berries, dairy products and citrus fruits. Reduce exposure to airborne irritants such as dust, animal hair, traffic fumes and cigarette smoke.

Ensure the diet includes plenty of oily fish and fresh fruit and vegetables and take a good quality supplement, which contains antioxidant nutrients such as vitamins A, C and E, selenium, zinc and magnesium. Probiotics have also been shown to reduce allergic conditions.

Marie Reilly is a qualified medical herbalist and nutritionist practicing in Lismore. To make an appointment for a private consultation telephone 058-53200 or 087-9345910 or visit www.thelismoreclinic.ie