

Hay Fever and Chinese Medicine

– by Prof. Shulan Tang

If you live in the UK the summer is always something nice to look forward to. The days become longer and the bright colours are a great sight after the long dull winter. However, the summer sun also brings discomfort and misery for a great many people. For people who suffer badly with Hay Fever, the long summer days are not so great.

Hay fever is a seasonal disease occurring most commonly from the beginning of May to the end of September. Sufferers can get it at any time during this period depending on the individual and their environment. The main symptoms include, sneezing, runny nose, itchy eyes, headaches, sore throat, coughing, and feelings of thirst, feverishness, restlessness and general lethargy.

What causes hay fever?

In terms of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) hay fever is classified as exogenous wind heat with superficial syndrome. People who have a hot body constitution easily suffer from hay fever when the warm and hot summer weather arrives. The external heat and wind combines with the heat inside the body to create hay fever symptoms. (People who have cold body constitution and suffer complaints such as arthritis are generally better in the warm weather.)

The causes of heated body constitutions are as follows:

1. Modern Lifestyle

i) High Energy Food Intake: The British diet is often high in fat and high in heat. We eat large quantities of food such as curry, chocolate, dairy products and chillies. Also people are prone to drinking and smoking a lot. These things all result in high blood heat.

ii) Stressful Lifestyles: For people who work hard, there may be a lot of stress involved. Men and women in high pressure occupations often fail to eat properly, consume lots of unbalanced food and lack a high intake of fresh fruit and vegetables. Again, this is a cause of heat in the body.

iii) Greater Freedom: Social freedom enables people to stay out all night eating, drinking and smoking. Some even drink and smoke all night at weekends. This will quickly lead to hot body constitution. Another aspect of increased freedom is instability in relationships and marriages. Problems with family and friends can affect the emotions and this raises the liver fire.

iv) High Standard of living: Britain is a rich country by global standards and many people are able to purchase a car and a house. However, these major purchases can be the cause of stress and fever along with restlessness and desire.

2. Modern environment

i) Central Heating Systems: Most British homes and places of work are well equipped with efficient central heating systems which keep us warm even when the weather is cold and damp outside. Many people's daily routines consist of a journey to work in a warm car or bus and back again which means that they fail to take in any fresh air all week long.

ii) High Pollution Environment: There are too many cars and factories in and around cities. High pollution and hot air easily invades the body when the temperature starts to rise and exacerbates the condition of those who already suffer from high body heat.

iii) High Rates of Hay Fever in Britain Some hay fever sufferers go abroad to hot countries in the hay fever season and find that their condition improves only to worsen again when they return to Britain. This is because of the British weather. Summer is warm or hot here, but people do not usually perspire which prevents the expulsion of internal heat. In popular holiday destinations such as Spain and America it is very hot in the summer and people sweat very easily to relieve exterior wind heat.

Although people who live in these climates often consume alcohol and hot food, the body heat caused by these foods and drinks is expelled by the natural sweating caused by the external temperatures.

Another explanation of why Britain has high rates of hay fever is that British people tend to keep their doors and windows closed, even in summer, which deprives them of fresh air. In contrast, in some countries like China, doors and windows are often kept open even in cold weather. It is no coincidence that hay fever is a relatively rare condition in China.

Many children who suffer from hay fever find that their condition improves as they get older because their diet improves to include less crisps and chocolate and more fresh fruit and vegetables. However some children do not experience this improvement as they get older and remain hay fever sufferers all of their lives. This may well be

due to the fact that their diets do not change.

Treatment of hay fever

1. Chinese Herbal Medicine

Usually we prescribe herbs which are cool in nature to clear away the heat and expel the wind such as Jin Yin Hua, Bo He, Sang Ye, Fang Feng etc. In severe cases it usually takes 4 - 6 days to see a big improvement. Mild cases can be treated with herbal tablets like 'Yin Qiao Jie Du Pian'.

2. Acupuncture

Acupuncture can relieve the symptoms, especially headaches and stress.

Preventative steps

1. Drink prepared Chinese herbs before the hay fever starts at the end of April or beginning of May. It is wise to drink some Chinese herbs to cool the body constitution to suit the warmer weather.

2. Acupuncture treatment once a week or fortnight can balance the body energy and temperature to avoid suffering from hay fever.

3. Eat the right food. Eat more fresh vegetables and fruit in spring and summer e.g. celery, cucumber, apples, pears etc. These are cool in nature and therefore good for hay fever sufferers. It is best to avoid hot and spicy food such as chilli and curry, chocolate, cheese, milk, lamb as well as alcohol and smoking.

4. Take lots of fresh air and exercise to keep fit to ward off the negative effects of the warm weather and high pollution.