

## Allergy: An Ayurvedic Perspective

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### Abstract:

Allergy is a disorder of the immune system. Allergic reactions occur when a hypersensitive immune system reacts to a common or unusual substance. Allergy is a hypersensitivity to certain stimuli/articles like drugs, foods, environmental irritants or substances, or conditions such as temperature and certain weathers. These substances act as antigens giving rise to a reaction in the body which involves production of certain substances like histamine in the body. Allergy can be hereditary in certain people, but an allergy can occur at any time or point in life. Any substance, whatever its origin, is a possible allergen. Food articles, ingredients in foods, medication, and other factors like pollen, dust, animal hair, etc can all cause allergic reactions. Satmya is a term used in Ayurveda which means tolerance. Asatmya is a term which means intolerance. This tolerance or intolerance can be towards any medicine, food, weather, or any habits. Ayurveda believes that Asatmya is a result of weak or imbalanced Agni (digestive fire). A weak Agni means there is Ama (toxin) formation in the body. Therefore allergies are more common in people with Ama in their system.

Key words: Allergy, Hypersensitivity, Ayurveda, Satmya, Asatmya, Ama.

### Introduction:

An allergy is a hypersensitive reaction of the body when it comes into contact with a substance that is in fact harmless. An allergy is certain causes, occurs suddenly and is predictable. The hypersensitive response comes from the natural immune system and ranges from a slightly uncomfortable feeling to a fatal anaphylaxis.

Ayurveda has explained various types of diseases and or symptoms that are similar to "a llergy. Acharya Charaka has described some allergic disorders, e.g., Udarda under KaphananatmajavyadhiandKotha under Raktapradoshajavikara. Acharya. Bhava Prakasha and Madhav have also described Shitapitta under allergic disorder.

Concept of Allergy in Ayurveda:

Ayurvedic theory maintains that although allergens such as pollen, dust, and dander trigger symptoms in susceptible people, they are *not* the primary cause of allergies. Instead, it's the accumulation of *ama* (Sanskrit for "that which harms or weakens") that's the main problem.

Ama is the sticky, toxic residue that comes from a less-than-ideal diet coupled with inadequate digestion. If you've ever fed wet wood into a fire that's not blazing, you know that smoke and charred waste are the result. In the same way, when your digestive fire is low or unsteady, or you eat foods that demand more digestive power than you possess, a kind of half-baked gunk is created—ama—and the trouble begins. When people continue their poor dietary practices, ama moves beyond the digestive tract via the circulatory system, settling in various bodily tissues and clogging internal pathways.

In an effort to protect the body from this poisonous light, the immune system kicks into high gear. As the toxic load increases, it becomes hyper-vigilant and overly defensive, violently attacking even harmless substances like pollen, causing pointless symptoms and potentially weakening its ability to fight a real foe.

Spring, in particular, is the season of high kaphadosha. (It's easy to see kapha's elements—earth and water—in your surroundings, as snow melts, streams swell, and soil becomes heavy with moisture.) Kapha's heavy, cold, and viscous qualities naturally tend to dampen, rather than kindle, the digestive fire, inviting the ama/ allergy process to develop.

From an Ayurvedic point of view, every allergy sufferer is different, and qualified practitioners tailor treatment to address the whole person. Typically, though, Ayurvedic allergy treatment will emphasize four steps: boost the digestive fire, adjust the diet to support a "clean burn," detoxify, and restore the strength of the immune system.

#### Causative factors for Allergy:

- Weak Agni (digestive fire)
- Ama accumulation (toxins)
- Individuals basic body constitution
- Imbalanced Dosha in the body (Vata, Pitta or Kapha)
- State of the Dhatu (tissue), Agni (digestive fire): This determines which tissue or organ system will be affected.
- Weak immune system
- Amount of allergens in the body.

#### Types of Allergy in Ayurveda:

- Vata related allergy
- Pitta related allergy
- Kapha related allergy

#### Discussion:

There is altered immune response in allergy. This condition in Ayurveda is described as "Ojovyapat". Both intrinsic and extrinsic causes of Ojovyapat are described in Ayurveda at various places. Allergy is defined as a disorder in which the body becomes hypersensitive to particular antigens, which provoke characteristic symptoms whenever they are subsequently encountered, whether inhaled, ingested, injected or otherwise contacted. Allergic condition in any person develops due to response of his body system with

allergens. Thus, presence of allergen is a basic need for generation of pathology, resulting in manifestation of allergy. According to Ayurveda the substances which are basically in juxtaposition to dhatus and body are considered as allergens. According to Ayurveda, the different ways and means by which a substance becomes unwholesome or allergen to an individual is explained under the concept of Viruddha, Satmya and Asatmya.

### **Other Allergens:**

Apart from the Viruddha allergens, following factors can also be considered as allergens like:

- Apathya
- Ahita
- Anupashaya
- Samashana
- Adhyashana
- Vishamashana
- Nidanarthakara
- Manasa.

The substance that is not harmful to the body and mind is known as Pathya and conversely all the things which prove to be harmful are apathya. There are a lot of apathya substances. Some are pollens, mold spores, aerosols and volatile chemicals. Non-immunological contact substances are plant (nuts), animals like caterpillar and jellyfish, medications like dimethyl sulphoxide, uncertain mechanism for contact of ammonium sulphate in hair bleaches. Some chemicals, foods, textiles, wood, saliva, cosmetics and perfumes are apathya. Physical stimuli, exercise induced anaphylactic syndrome, solar, cold, heat, vibrations and water create over reaction. The food articles and behavior that do not maintain the harmony of Dhatus and vitiate doshas are considered as Ahita. All the modalities of treatment such as hetu, vyadhi, hetu-vyadhiviparita and hetu, vyadhi, hetu-vyadhiviparitarthakari-Anna, Aushadha and Vihara which result into amelioration are termed upashaya and the same when prove to be detrimental to health are anupashaya. Thus, almost anything can become allergen. The partaking of both pathya and apathya together is termed Samashana and it is harmful.

Eating again after a meal when previous meal is yet undigested is adhyashana. To eat before or after the appropriate time is vishamashana. One disease when becomes the cause of another (e.g., Cor-Pulomonale). Few other examples are: Raktapitta from Jwar, Shotha; Kasa and Kshaya from Pratishyaya. Inappropriate sound, touch, vision, taste and smell have been also considered to produce asatmya (allergic). Mental emotions evolving should be retaining in mind so these are considered as Dharaniya urges. The wholesome food also taken in proper quantity does not get digested and produces ama (toxin) due to anxiety, grief, fear, anger, uncomfortable bed and vigil. The substances to which the body becomes accustomed after prolonged use and which do not cause deleterious effects are Satmya. Satmya is the homologues of a substance by the habit of using it for a long period. Satmya can be a hita or an ahita. All those substances which are

not homologated or compatible to the body either be they hita/ahita are Asatmya (allergens).

### **Conclusion:**

Ayurveda conceives the idea of allergy and intolerance (asatmya) is caused by a variety of unwanted endogenous and exogenous materials and way of life. Concept of Virudhahar or unwholesome diet in relation to allergy is very relevant in the present context.

Asatmya is due to intermixing of disproportionate diet causing long-term toxic effect on body. They are desha, jati, ritu, roga, vyayam, udaka, diwaswapna and rasa. For management of various allergic problems, one should consider all these points in the mind and treatment should be planned accordingly. By this way, we would be able to treat various types of allergies which are much difficult to treat.

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