

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Using Nature to “Fight Back” on the Irritants Nature Brings During Spring

New York, NY -- (May 2, 2006) Spring has sprung and rebirth is happening all around us. In addition to baby animals being born and trees sprouting brand new buds, seasonal allergies are “reborn” at this time of year too. As pollen from trees, grass, flowers and plants makes it’s way into the air, more than 35 million Americans will suffer the common sneezing, wheezing, runny nose and itchy, watery, red eyes that characterize Spring allergies.

While many sufferers head to the drugstore to purchase popular, over-the-counter antihistamines, these traditional medications often produce troubling side effects such as drowsiness, dry mouth and nausea. Allergy sufferers may be better suited to look to nature to cure what ails them. “Using an integrative approach combining conventional medicine with life-style changes and gentler natural approaches should be the standard of care for most all medical problems; and especially so with allergy and sinus conditions,” says Woodson Merrell, executive director of the Continuum Center for Health and Healing at Beth Israel Medical Center. There is a growing evidence basis in the medical literature on the usefulness value of gentler nature-based products and techniques in safely and effectively alleviating allergy symptoms, without the unpleasant side effects of traditional antihistamines.

Below are some alternative remedies that may be used to help treat and prevent seasonal allergies:

- **Butterbur (*Petasites hybridus*)** – A European herb found effective in controlling symptoms of hay fever. A Swiss study in the British Medical Journal that showed one tablet of butterbur taken four times per day was just as effective as a popular antihistamine.
- **Nettles** – an American herb with anti-histamine properties.
- **Perilla** – a more recently recognized herb often effective alone as an herbal antihistamine.
- **Saline (salt-water) Nasal Spray (alone or with essential oils)** – works to wash out pollen and reduce or thin out mucous in the nose. Used by Ayurvedic (Indian) medicine via Neti Pots.

- **Quercetin (flavanoid compound)** – derived from onions and other sulfurous foods, can be helpful at reducing allergy symptoms.
- **Hot Spicy Foods** – experts say the spicier the dish, the more likely it is to thin mucous which can be helpful in clearing nasal passages. Sufferers can try cayenne pepper, hot ginger, fenugreek, onion and garlic.
- **Avoiding Certain Foods** – In allergy prone individuals, food allergies are often much more involved than commonly recognized.
- **Homeopathy** – there is over 100 years of empirical use of homeopathic remedies for allergies, many in common use today as both sublingual pellets and nasal sprays.
- **Acupuncture** – this traditional Chinese medical practice is based on the idea that stimulating specific points with needles on the body can be effective at changing internal reactions. This is often a very effective adjunctive technique for people with allergy and chronic sinus problems.
- **Other indigenous herbs** – while less accessible than Western herbs and vitamin supplements, Chinese and Ayurvedic herbs have a long (literally thousands of years) history of safe and effective use in allergies.
- **General immune-strengthening and inflammation-reducing strategies** – Involving lifestyle measures and judicious use of supplements (Omega-3 fish oils, antioxidants, and herbal anti-inflammatories like turmeric, boswellia, rosemary and ginger) will reduce the body's tendency to react to irritants in the first place.
- **Desensitization techniques** – either injected or sublingual.

Researchers have determined that plants have been used for medicinal purposes since 2600 B.C. In Babylon, often thought to be the cradle of civilization, medical texts on clay tablets have recorded symptoms of illness and recommended prescriptions of plants like cedar, cypress, myrrh and licorice for use. Later, during the Roman Empire, Marcus Aurelius developed elaborate compounding formulas that used substances like opium, hyocyanus, and grape juice. The ideas for mixing, extracting and refining combination drugs carried over into the eighteenth century and have their counterparts in the compounding that's done in today's retail pharmacies. In olden times, plants were valued for the many compounds contained in the entire plant yet today, many Americans look at plant remedies as old-fashioned. Still, in much of the world (80%) outside of the United States botanical medicine is a part of primary healthcare. Americans are finally beginning to come back around to realize that maybe utilizing nature is effective in treating health problems, like allergies, that are caused by nature's changing cycles.

If you'd like to interview Dr. Merrell and a patient who has treated their allergies naturally, please call Elizabeth Dowling in the public affairs office at: 212-523-4047.

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