# POLLEN GOT YOU DOWN?

Nettles can help to reduce histamine levels

## *Columnist Pamela Spence reveals which herbs are our allies in the fight against hay fever*

Hay fever – it's the bane of nearly one in three people in the UK. Doctors are reporting a spike in cases this year and it is predicted that double the number will be affected by 2030. This annual trial for some can turn the most beautiful summer day to misery and leave many folks running for cover inside and away from nature. Hay fever is a well-known seasonal allergic condition where the body's defences over-react to pollen, leaving the sufferer with an itchy, scratchy throat, sore, watery eyes, sneezing fits and runny nose.

If hay fever affects you it is important to know what pollens your body reacts to most because then you can plan the season a bit better. First up is tree pollen in early spring, followed by grass pollen from mid-May to July and finally weed pollen from end of June to September. It may be that you are only triggered by one of these types.

To reduce symptoms, or perhaps even get rid of them there are some simple practical measures you can take. Barrier ointments reduce the number of pollen particles entering our noses and drying washing inside avoids pollen getting trapped in clothes and bedding.

In the world of herbs we have several

allies – elderflower is the most common. The elder really is one of the most useful trees we have and its timing is exemplary. In spring and summer the tiny creamy yellow blossoms are our best defence against hay fever, and in autumn, when they turn to berries they are highly anti-viral and help us to ward off colds and even 'flu. Nettles are extremely useful as they can reduce histamine levels as can chamomile and echinacea. Drinking equal parts of echinacea, nettle and chamomile tea 2-3 times per day can really help to reduce symptoms and if you can add elderflower to that it will impact your symptoms even more.

Medical herbalists can also prescribe more specialised herbs like eyebright for people who have itchy, sore eyes or baical skullcap and ephedra for very difficult cases. Ephedra is the original source of the drug ephedrine – which is basically plant adrenaline and can calm even the most outrageous of allergic symptoms. As it's a restricted herb it's only available for qualified medical herbalists to dispense and if your symptoms are particularly difficult to manage, it's well worth it – so go and see your local medical herbalist if the simple approach is not enough!

Elderflower

Echinacea

Pamela Spence, MNIMH
pamelaspence.co.uk
FB@PamelaSpenceHerbalist
To find a medical herbalist in your area go to www.nimh.org.uk