

Coping with Changes in Season



A Science of Medicine
The Art of Care

By: Dr. Grant Nijland

A famous song goes, “With every season, turn, turn, turn!” This phrase, although not aimed at, is indeed true when it comes to matters regarding our health. As the final traces of winter start making way for the first of the summer rains, there are definite changes happening in our immediate environment. Research indicates that coupled with this are mental, emotional and physical changes, which many of us experience at this time of year. These occurrences follow a logical pattern that can be linked to the environment and our personal interaction with it.

Symptoms may include:

- Tiredness and a lack of energy
- Stress & Depression
- Sinusitis, hay fever and allergies

This article focuses on ways to deal with the symptoms brought about by the changes in season and how best to cope with them.

Tiredness and a lack of energy: Winter often leaves us feeling sluggish and lacking in energy at the time of the year when we want to have boundless energy to enjoy the warmer weather. This is linked to the fact that in winter our biological clocks are set to conserve energy in order to maintain heat in our systems. At the end of a winter that has seen people ‘knocked flat’ by repeated bouts of colds or flu, our systems are prone to feelings of lethargy. The beginning of the summer season thus leaves us in great need of something to boost our energy levels as the climate changes.

There are a vast amount of energy boosting products available on the market, both allopathic and natural. Before reaching for the nearest quick fix however, here are a few hints which could help you cope better:

- You can restore your energy by waking early and taking a brisk walk.
- Your mind is a most powerful tool. Having a positive attitude can help you shake off some of the lethargy.
- Avoid artificial stimulants such as caffeine and energy drinks – these give a false sense of energy but unfortunately lead to a ‘crash’ or collapse once the caffeine wears off.
- Vitamin and mineral tonics are great but the effect can take a period of time to be felt
- An ideal product would be one that provides instant energy as well as having the added effects of a mild laxative action, to remove toxins through the colon, with ingredients that are rich in vitamins and minerals in their natural state and contains no artificial stimulants.

Stress & Depression: The changes in our environment are often aggravated by other influences. This can leave us vulnerable to feelings of stress and depression. Furthermore, most people tend to turn to ‘comfort foods’ in the winter months, which are loaded with carbohydrates and fats. This leads to weight gain and a general feeling of sluggishness. Maintaining a suitable diet in the winter months is an effective way of combating this as spring and summer arrive. If you do tend to feel overly stressed try adopting suitable meditation techniques or simply take some time out

each day to relax and reflect. Together with a suitable exercise programme this feeling of being 'weighed down' can be overcome.

October and November are also an extremely stressful time for students who are under immense pressure to do well in the upcoming exams. Instead of turning to fatty foods and caffeine fixes, there are other effective ways of coping with exam stress. Vitamin B as well as other vitamin and mineral supplements are effective in assisting the learner. Ginkgo biloba is reported to enhance memory and Stress-Away tablets or syrup, has been shown to assist in boosting concentration levels, enhance memory and assist in relieving stress.

Sinusitis, hay fever and allergies: Perhaps the most distressing of the conditions that many experience as the seasons change are the uncomfortable, often painful symptoms associated with sinusitis, hay-fever and allergies.

What are allergies and hay-fever? Allergies are overreactions of the immune system to foreign substances. In South Africa it is estimated that more than 8 million people suffer from allergies.

"Hay fever" is a type of allergic response. The term was prompted by symptoms noted when harvesting hay. "Allergic rhinitis" is the correct term used to describe this allergic reaction. Allergic rhinitis that occurs during a specific season is called "seasonal allergic rhinitis". When it occurs throughout the year, it is called "perennial allergic rhinitis."

Causes: Allergic reactions are triggered by substances called allergens. When an allergen comes into contact with the body, it causes the immune system to develop an allergic reaction. Examples of allergens are: Pollen, mould, house dust mites, cigarette smoke, certain foods, animal dander.

Symptoms include: dry, itchy throat, ear irritation, stuffy or runny nose, sneezing, shortness of breath, red or swollen eyes, headache, swelling of lips or tongue, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and inability to concentrate.

Being aware of the allergen / allergens that you are susceptible to allows treatment methods to be streamlined.

Treatment is aimed at reducing symptoms through avoidance of triggering stimuli. Your Tibb practitioner or doctor can best prescribe a natural treatment option available for your condition.

Diet: To ensure that you cope suitably with the shift brought about in your physical health due to the change in season, suitable dietary adjustments can also be made:

- Increase fruit intake, vegetables, grains, raw nuts and seeds.
- Eat yoghurt at least 3 times a week.
- Foods rich in magnesium are very beneficial e.g. kidney beans, soya, almonds, molasses, bananas and brown rice.

By understanding the environmental changes that are happening around you, you can take charge of your health through adopting suitable measures. Hopefully in this way you will be able to enjoy the lazy, hazy days of the summer ahead.