

Spring allergies linked to some food allergies, specialist says

April 8 2014, by Stasia Thompson

People sensitive to today's high tree pollen count for birch and oak could also be susceptible to allergies with carrots, celery and almonds.

"It's healthy if certain foods make your mouth water, but it is unhealthy if foods make your nose run or your gums and throat itch," said Joseph Leiya, MD, an allergist who performs the Gottlieb Allergy Count, the official allergy count for the Midwest. "The spring [allergy count](#) in the Midwest is high in birch and oak. For people sensitive to those tree pollens, carrots, celery, almonds, apples, peaches and pears can also trigger a reaction."

More than 45 million Americans suffer from [seasonal allergies](#), primarily occurring in the spring and fall, according to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America.

And it's not just birch and oak that have related allergies. Grasses and ragweed also have associations to other allergies.

"Those with grass allergies should avoid melon, tomatoes and oranges," Leiya said. "And [ragweed allergies](#) are also linked to allergies to bananas, cantaloupe, cucumber, zucchini and chamomile tea."

While many people experience minor reactions to certain foods that are basically harmless, others have extreme reactions.

"Difficulty breathing and itchy rashes are signs to go to a board-certified

allergist or, in extreme cases, straight to the emergency room," said Leija, who has been performing the Gottlieb Allergy Count for more than two decades.

Dr. Leija, who normally conducts the Gottlieb Allergy Count from March to October, began the count later than usual because of this year's longer winter. "The trees have been slow to bloom this year due to the inconsistent warm and cold temperatures," he said. "The recent rains coupled with the sun has caused a huge growth spurt in the trees, which is resulting post-nasal drip, congestion and headaches in sufferers."

Dr. Leija, an octogenarian, rises before dawn to collect specimens from his pollen-catching machine atop a building on the Gottlieb Memorial Hospital campus to deliver the count to the public by 7 a.m. The Gottlieb Allergy Count is then available via Twitter (@GottliebAllergy), at Gottliebhospital.org and in English at 1-866-4-POLLEN (866-476-5536).

"You cannot control the weather, but you can control your environment," he said. "Take your [allergy](#) medication and see your [allergist](#) before you experience health problems." Dr. Leija also advises:

- Wash your hair before going to sleep to remove trapped pollens.
- Rinse your nostrils lightly with saline solution daily to remove irritants.
- Keep windows closed to protect inside air from contaminants.
- Run the air conditioner and air purifier to remove pollutants.
- Leave exposed outdoor gear, ranging from shoes to backpacks, on porch steps to preserve interior air.
- Cover mouth with a handkerchief or mask when doing spring yard cleanups, including raking, edging and mowing.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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