Nasal Irrigation: Spring Cleaning for Your Nose

Before you reach for expensive over-the-counter or prescription allergy remedies, you might want to try an inexpensive alternative treatment that really seems to work: nasal irrigation, or washing out your nose once or twice daily with warm salt water. Most medical studies on nasal irrigation for allergies are rather positive, and there's little risk and little expense in trying.

Spring marks the beginning of pollen season, and the same yellowish dust that coats your car also fills your nasal passages, causing enough irritation to trigger an allergic reaction. Nasal irrigation simply washes away the irritants causing the allergy symptoms.

Many medical institutions, such as the Mayo Clinic, advocate the use of nasal irrigation. The most recent study appeared in January 2009, with the 200 patients in the study reporting some relief of symptoms from twice daily irrigations.

To try it, you can invest two dollars in a bulb syringe or you can buy a neti pot, which looks like a little oil lamp, often used by yoga devotees. Nasal irrigation is known as jala neti in the ancient Indian practice of Ayurveda.

Sources: Live Science April 16, 2009

Dr. Mercola's Comments:

If you have seasonal allergies, hay fever or chronic sinusitis, nasal irrigation is a simple and inexpensive tool that can help relieve your symptoms. Originating in the Ayurvedic medical tradition, nasal irrigation or "jala neti" has been used since ancient times to help gently flush away irritants that cause allergy symptoms and sinus infections.

The goal of the nasal irrigation, which typically is made of a natural saline solution, is to reduce or eliminate the recurrent irritant so your body can be given a chance to heal itself. Oftentimes antihistamines, antibiotics or even surgical interventions are used to treat these conditions but do little to treat their underlying causes, nor their recurrence.

On the other hand, nasal irrigation has showed much promise, not only anecdotally but also in research studies. One recent study in children even found that nasal saline irrigation significantly eased symptoms while lessening the need for medications like steroid nasal sprays.

Nasal irrigation is useful not only for symptom relief when your allergies or sinuses are acting up, but also for routine “cleansing.”

Nasal irrigation has actually been a part of yoga health-oriented "cleaning rituals" for centuries, and practitioners use a neti pot (a small, teapot-like pot) to pour lightly salted warm water into one nostril and then let it run out of the other. Some will also forcefully exhale the water to further cleanse their nasal passages.

This practice proved to be beneficial, as one study of those using daily saltwater nasal irrigation showed it helped to protect against the common cold.

Why is Salt Good for Your Sinuses and More?

Salt – in its natural form – has many therapeutic properties when inhaled or used as a soak. Not only are brine baths, which you can make at home by adding a large amount (about 2.6 pounds of salt for
a 27-32 gallon tub) of natural, high-quality salt like Himalayan salt to your bathwater, a great way to revitalize your body, but salt rooms are also growing in popularity.

These rooms, which are essentially small rooms covered in salt, originated in Eastern Europe but have made their way to the United States, including to my hometown of Chicago. Visitors sit in the room for a half-hour or an hour to simply breathe in the salty air. And anecdotal reports say they’re beneficial for everything from asthma to respiratory infections to stress.

Nasal irrigation, however, is likely beneficial not only because of the therapeutic effects of salt, but also due to the physical flushing that helps remove irritants.

If you are going to use salt in your nasal irrigation I would suggest you avoid using conventional processed salts and instead use a high-quality sea salt or even better Himalayan Salt.

How to Use Nasal Irrigation

Nasal irrigation takes a bit of getting used to, but once you learn the technique you’ll see how simple it really is. To start, you’ll need:

- All-natural Himalayan salt or sea salt
- Filtered or distilled water
- Neti pot or bulb syringe [Or a Nasalene]
- Towel or washcloth

The technique, outlined below, may seem unusual at first. However, once learned, you will quickly realize how beneficial it is for sinus problems.

1. Locate a workable container. The neti pot is specially designed with a spout that fits comfortably in one nostril. Alternatives you can use include a bulb syringe, a small flower watering pot, a turkey baster or just a teacup (though the latter will be messier).

2. Fill the container with lukewarm salt water. The salt-to-water ratio is 1 teaspoon sea salt to 1 pint (2 cups) water. Filtered or distilled water is best.

3. Have some tissues within reach for this next part. Over a sink, tilt your head forward so you are looking directly down toward the sink. Insert the spout into your right nostril. It is important that you breathe through your mouth. Turn your head to the right and let water move into the right nostril and exit the left nostril. Normally, you will feel the water as it passes through your sinuses. It is fine if some of the water drains into your mouth. Simply spit it out and adjust the tilt of your head.

4. After using a cup of water, repeat the above procedure for the other nostril.

5. To finish, expel any remaining water by quickly blowing air out both open nostrils 15 times over the sink. Avoid the temptation to block off one nostril, as doing so may force water into your eustachian tube.

It is important to follow all the instructions very carefully and continue the routine until all your symptoms resolve. This may take three to six months in the case of a chronic infection, so be patient. For acute problems like seasonal allergies, perform the nasal wash up to four times per day until your symptoms improve.

For chronic problems like sinus infections, it is usual to do the wash one or more times daily and continue for several months.
More Tips for Seasonal Allergy and Hay Fever Relief

Many people struggle with allergy symptoms at this time of year, and nasal irrigation is a simple, safe and inexpensive tool to relieve your symptoms. But to really address allergies at the source takes a deeper approach that involves:

1. Strengthening your immune system: Eliminate or limit sugars and grains from your diet, as detailed in my nutrition plan and even more in-depth in my book Take Control of Your Health.

2. Exercising: The rate of hay fever among inactive kids is more than double that of healthier, more active youngsters, so regular exercise is an important tool to help prevent allergies from forming in the first place.

3. Addressing your emotional stress: The Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) is one profoundly simple, inexpensive and effective tool to address the underlying emotional traumas that can devastate your immune system and allow allergies to flourish.

4. Getting plenty of animal-based omega-3 fat: The omega-3 fat in fish oil and krill oil helps reduce both allergic and inflammatory response.

5. Optimizing your vitamin D levels: Healthy amounts of vitamin D can also help to lower inflammation.

6. Taking a high-quality probiotic: Good bacteria (probiotics) may help lower levels of an antibody that produces allergy symptoms while raising levels of a different antibody, called IgG, that may play a protective role against allergic reactions.

7. Considering an air purifier for your home, to help remove airborne allergens.

[A couple more suggestions: Radiofrequency microwave exposure greatly increases the problems of allergies. Avoid exposure to cell phones, cell towers, Wi-Fi, wireless routers, Wi-Fi enabled laptop computers, etc. Using a Nasalene is much easier and less messy than a neti pot or other things like basters or bulb syringes. Also, if you have an Ozone generator, you can warm up the water and thoroughly ozonate it for 5-15 minutes before you flush your sinuses. This purifies and oxygenates the water and makes it more effective.]