



# Finding Solutions to Your Allergy Problem: Conventional and Alternative Medicine Options

By Emily Penney, ND

**Allergies.** What a nuisance they are! We all seem to know someone (ourselves included) who suffer from this common problem, whether they are seasonal due to pollens, or more of an everyday occurrence because of food, pets, or chemicals. For some, allergic reactions can even be life-threatening. To date, modern medicine has not had very satisfactory long-term solutions to dealing with allergies. And for reasons unknown, allergies seem to be coming more and more common. Allergic reactions underlie many common health conditions such as asthma, exzema, chronic ear infections, sinusitis, digestive disorders, heartburn, celiac disease, irritable bowel syndrome, autism, ADD & ADHD, even depression and insomnia! The list goes on and on.

## What is an allergy?

An allergy is a misguided reaction, or hypersensitivity, of the immune system (<http://www.medterms.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=3907>) to a harmless substance. In other words, it's when the immune system gets confused. Instead of just fighting the "bad guys" (such as bacteria and viruses) it starts fighting "good guys" too (such as nutritious foods, or neutral things like pet dander, pollen, etc.)

The substances that trigger allergies are called allergens. For the purposes of this article the most common allergens are divided into the following categories:

### Environmental (Inhalants/ Contactants):

Pollen, mold, chemicals, dust, grass, animal dander, perfume, bee-stings etc.

### Food (Ingestants):

**Type I: Immediate reaction** (can be severe anaphylactic)

Most common are peanuts, strawberries, medications, etc.

**Type II: Delayed reaction**

Can be anything. Some common examples are wheat, dairy, corn, gluten, sugar, & soy.

## "I've got terrible allergies! What do I do?"

The following discussion addresses both conventional and alternative diagnostic & treatment options for allergies. In some cases it is very appropriate to use both natural and conventional medicines to manage allergy symptoms while the long-term alternative treatments are underway. I commonly recommend this in my practice.

## **Conventional Medicine Options for Diagnosing and Treating Allergies:**

### **Environmental Allergies**

#### ***Conventional Diagnosis***

There are two types of allergy testing considered to be valid by most of the conventional medical world: Skin testing (prick/puncture, intradermal, and patch) and blood testing for antibodies to allergens such as ELISA or RAST. For more information on these testing procedures visit <http://www.webmd.com/allergies/allergy-tests>.

While the conventional world considers skin testing to be more accurate, there is clear evidence that skin testing is a poor procedure for picking up common food allergies.

#### ***Conventional Treatment***

##### Medication:

As these type of allergens are usually very difficult to avoid, they are typically treated with antihistamines or corticosteroids which suppress the allergic response.

##### Allergy shots:

Some patients elect to undergo allergy shots, which involves injecting a small amount of allergen under the skin at frequent intervals, usually for a year or more. These treatments can be painful, and are often quite costly, however they can be effective. Results are not guaranteed however, and they are not very effective for treating food allergies.

### **Food Allergies**

#### **Type I: Immediate reaction**

##### ***Conventional Diagnosis***

Conventional medicine usually only recognizes this first category of food allergy, the immediate reaction type. The technical terms are Type I, or IgE mediated allergy. This type of allergy is quick and unmistakable, as it launches a rapid histamine response from the immune system. Symptoms include swelling, hives, itching, and, depending on severity can lead to anaphylactic shock (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anaphylaxis>) which can be fatal if left untreated.

##### ***Conventional Treatment***

Avoidance is recommended. If exposure occurs, antihistamines plus epinephrine for more severe anaphylactic reactions. Allergy shots are usually avoided as a treatment for this type of allergy, as they can trigger severe reactions themselves.

#### **Type II: Delayed reaction**

##### ***Conventional Diagnosis***

This is by far, the most common type of food allergy. Unfortunately, conventional medicine seems to mostly ignore it. Perhaps this is because the testing procedures that are favored typically miss Type II reactions. These are usually mediated by IgG antibodies, which don't show up well on skin-scratch tests. Blood tests such as ELISA or RAST are better, but even those aren't perfect. You can expect about an 80% accuracy rate with a blood test for food allergies.

What ends up happening for most, is that these types of allergies go undiagnosed, and are recognized only by their symptoms, which are diagnosed as IBS, asthma, exzema, ADD, etc. These secondary conditions are then usually treated with suppressive medications which temporarily alleviate the symptoms, but do nothing to treat the cause. Long-term ill health often results.

### ***Conventional Treatment***

Avoidance is generally recommended for known food allergies. Allergy shots are not as effective for food allergies as for environmental allergies, though some treatment centers do use them.

## **Alternative Medicine Options for Diagnosing and Treating Allergies:**

### **Environmental Allergies**

#### ***Naturopathic Diagnosis***

In addition to the conventional testing procedures, neuromuscular sensitivity testing, a relative of kinesiology (<http://www.naet.com/subscribers/what.html#kinesiology>), is a quick and painless diagnostic tool which is gaining popularity. For mild cases, clinical diagnosis based on patient history can also be used.

#### ***Naturopathic Treatment***

##### Short term:

To control allergy symptoms until a long-term solution is achieved, quercitin, vitamin C, and believe it or not, water, are all excellent natural antihistamines. Other treatments include bromelain, nettles, and liver detoxification.

It can be helpful to install a HEPA filter in the house and vacuum cleaner to remove airborne allergens. Careful hygiene in the bedroom is a must, with weekly washing of bedclothes in hot water, vacuuming and dusting.

While temporary symptom management is helpful for quality of life in the moment, it is not a cure. As soon as these medicines are discontinued, the allergy symptoms will return. This is known as palliative treatment. Don't you also want to be working towards a cure?

##### Long term:

The best long term treatment I have found is NAET, Nambudripad's Allergy Elimination Technique (<http://www.naet.com/subscribers/what.html>). This non-invasive desensitization technique is explained in more detail below.

## **Food Allergies**

### **Type I: Immediate reaction**

#### ***Naturopathic Diagnosis***

Diagnostic procedures for this type of allergy include all those of conventional medicine, as well as NST, Neuromuscular sensitivity testing (<http://www.naet.com/subscribers/what.html#kinesiology>).

#### ***Naturopathic Treatment***

These types of allergens must be scrupulously avoided. Any patient with anaphylactic type allergies should carry an epi-pen with them at all times.

NAET (<http://www.naet.com/subscribers/what.html>) can be helpful for these types of reactions, but must be done very carefully. If successful, NAET treatment can truly be life-changing, as it frees up the patient to live their life without a constant fear of reaction.

## **Food Allergies**

### **Type II: Delayed reaction**

#### ***Naturopathic Diagnosis***

There are three main diagnostic tools I use in my practice to determine this type of allergy. They are the elimination & challenge diet, ELISA blood testing, and neuromuscular sensitivity testing (NST). They each have their pros & cons. The elimination and challenge diet is considered by many holistic medicine doctors to be the gold standard for determining food allergies. It is very accurate when done correctly, however, many patients find this difficult and time consuming. The blood test is very easy, but only about 80 percent accurate, and there is a fee involved of course. Blood tests are only checking for antibody mediated allergies, Type I (IgE) and/ or Type II (IgG). NST is done in office during a visit, and is extremely accurate, fast, and non-invasive. Another benefit to NST is the ability to test for any type of allergy including foods, inhalants, & contactants, and is not limited to antibody mediated responses.

#### ***Naturopathic Treatment***

Avoidance.

Avoidance.

Avoidance.

Anybody besides me tired of avoidance?

This is where NAET (<http://www.naet.com/subscribers/what.html>) comes in.

After several years of practice in Washington, where I often told patients daily to stop eating x, y, & z so that their health could improve, I found myself hoping for a better way. Two colleagues and dear friends of mine had taken the NAET (Nambudripad's Allergy Elimination Technique) training around that time, and urged me to follow suit. I was skeptical. Allergy elimination? Using accupressure, kinesiology, and energy balancing techniques? It sounded too good to be true.

A few months later, I experienced a medical condition where I needed to take a pharmaceutical medication. Not long after beginning the course of the drug, I started having hives and itching all over my entire body. Uh oh. I was having a drug reaction. I could control it with Benadryl, but I didn't want to get into polypharmacy (taking drugs to control the side-effects of other drugs.) Besides, the Benadryl made me very sleepy, forcing an excess consumption of caffeine (another drug...) A bit sheepishly, I called one of my colleagues to see if she could help me.

My doctor friend was delighted to help, and gave me a couple of NAET treatments over the course of 24 hours. She showed me how to do a series of home treatments on myself, and told me to come back if it didn't resolve. The hives were better but not gone. A week later she repeated the treatment, and I did my home treatments. The hives were gone! If I stopped the home treatments though, they came back. Wow. After doing the home treatments diligently for about one month, the hives resolved completely. During this whole time, I never stopped taking the medication. Please note that according to conventional wisdom, drug reactions do not just go away, in fact usually they get worse.

Well, I might be a skeptic, but I'm not an idiot. Sometimes we just need to experience something to believe it! Color me convinced, NAET works. Suddenly a whole new world opened up as I visualized the possibilities for my patients.

I signed up for the next available training with Dr. Nambudripad, and am pleased to announce that I am now offering this wonderful alternative for allergy treatments to the Boise community.

### **Learn More**

To find out more about NAET, I recommend visiting the NAET website [www.naet.com](http://www.naet.com), our clinic's website [www.boisenaturalhealth.com](http://www.boisenaturalhealth.com), and reading "Say Goodbye to Illness" or "Say Goodbye to Allergies" by Dr. Nambudripad, both of which are available in our office and on the NAET website. I also offer free ten minute consultations to prospective patients, to help you find out if NAET treatment is right for you.

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Dr Penney is a licensed naturopathic physician, certified NAET practitioner, and classical homeopath. To schedule a free consultation or appointment please call:

Boise Natural Health at 208-338-0405.

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