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Is It Menopause OR IS IT ME?

Lifestyle > Wellness



Terrible Allergies

This unexpected midlife side effect is nothing to sneeze at.

By Lisa Arbetter Published: Jun 13, 2025 9:08 AM EDT

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HEARST OWNED

We know that menopause causes night sweats and hot flashes, but is it the culprit for everything that goes awry when you hit a certain age? In this new series, we unpack the weird and confounding health woes people encounter in midlife and determine which can be chalked up to the Change, and which are...well, just a you thing.

Your nose won't stop dripping. Your eyes are always watering. And the lotion you've used since the '90s suddenly gives you a rash. No, you're not cursed—it might just be perimenopause.

Many women in midlife develop new sensitivities to things like perfume, detergent, or certain fabrics, says **Tania Elliott, MD**, a dual board-certified internist and allergist. "It's not rare," she says. "I just don't think people necessarily connect the dots."

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Researchers may be starting to, however. A few **emerging studies** have begun exploring a link between menopause and nasal symptoms, though findings are still mixed.

The Itchy and Rashy Show

Let's start with a surprise twist: Technically, what you are experiencing isn't allergies. A true allergy triggers your immune system to produce antibodies, which show up on blood or skin tests. "We typically don't see new-onset allergic rhinitis—like an actual pollen allergy—in people over 50," says

Elliott. "What we do see is an increase in nonallergic rhinitis and skin sensitivities."

If it isn't an allergen, what's the true culprit of your woes? It's hormones. (Shocker!) During perimenopause, estrogen levels swing dramatically while progesterone steadily declines. Those shifts affect your body in two key ways.

First, hormonal fluctuations can confuse your immune system. "We think estrogen stimulates certain immune cells, called Th2 cells, that trigger allergy-like reactions," says Elliott. At the same time, progesterone—your natural antihistamine—drops off, letting histamine, the chemical responsible for itching, redness, sneezing, and congestion, run wild.

Second, your skin and mucous membranes, like those in your nose, eyes, and mouth, become drier and thinner. Thinner skin makes it easier for irritants to sneak in, and your body may try to compensate for dryness by making your eyes water and your nose leak like a faucet.

This perfect storm of hormonal chaos and immune overreaction makes your body suddenly hypersensitive to things it once tolerated. The result: symptoms that look and feel like allergies, but aren't actually allergies.

Finding Sweet Relief

Understanding what's happening is the first step; the next is figuring out how to feel better.

- **Try antihistamines and nasal steroids.** These OTC options (like Zyrtec and Allegra) block histamines and reduce inflammation, easing nasal and skin symptoms.
- **Consider switching soaps, lotions, and detergents.** Fragrance-free and hypoallergenic formulations can reduce the risk of skin freakouts.
- **Support your immune system.** Maintain a healthy weight, reduce stress, and consider probiotics to support your gut, which is a key player in immune health.
- **Talk to your doctor about hormone therapy.** While not a guaranteed fix, it can stabilize the hormonal fluctuations driving these immune shifts, especially if you're experiencing other menopausal symptoms too.

Elliott recommends seeing both an allergist and your gynecologist, making sure to mention all your symptoms, allergic or otherwise.

The good news is that this, too, shall pass, along with most other uncomfortable, unpredictable, and downright unhinged menopause symptoms. Until then, keep tissues on hand—and be grateful for every sneeze that doesn't throw out your back or require a change of underwear.

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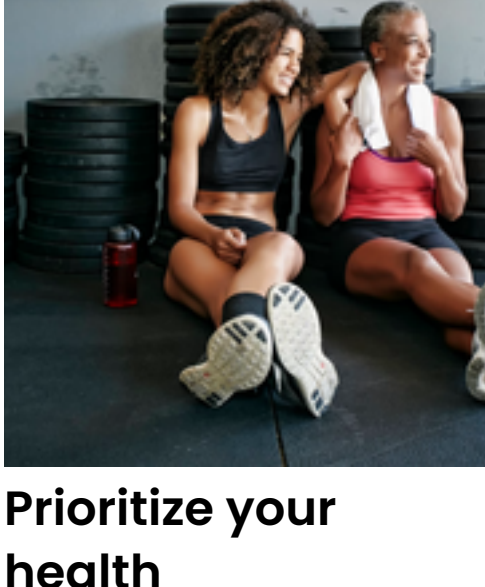
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