

that they trap airborne contaminants—including dust, molds, copier toner and cigarette smoke—inside.

To avoid trouble, keep your windows open as much as possible, but be sure to avoid cold or hot drafts. Ask that any harsh chemical cleaners be replaced with less toxic brands.

If necessary, get an air-filtration system—one that generates negative ions as well as scrubs the air. *Explanation:* Most air pollutants are positively charged. Negative ions combine with these positive particles, so contaminants fall to the floor.

If your office mates smoke, ask them to refrain from doing so—or ask to be moved elsewhere. If necessary, petition your manager to make your office smoke-free.

Resource: Doctors Ought to Care, 1423 Harper St., Augusta, Georgia 30912.

Many respiratory problems clear up under the proper temperature and humidity levels. *Rule of thumb:* It's best to maintain a room temperature of 73° F to 79° F in the summer and 68° F to 74° F in winter. Humidity should be kept between 30% and 70%—install a humidifier if necessary.

Stress. This usually does not stem from work itself, but rather, from negative attitudes about the work. *Helpful:* Replace negative thoughts with positive affirmations.

Example: I choose not to think _____...I choose to think _____ (fill in the last blank with a positive thought).

Don't blame yourself for unavoidable problems on the job. If you find you cannot stop your negative thoughts, consider getting a new job...or seeing a counselor.

Always try to communicate clearly and honestly with your colleagues. Listen to them carefully, then respond with directness and honesty. Avoid communication that is overly passive or aggressive. Be true to yourself and your needs.

One especially effective anti-stress technique is the *quieting reflex*. It takes only six seconds and is surprisingly effective. *Procedure:*

•Become aware of any worry, annoyance or anxiety.

•Smile to yourself.

•Repeat to yourself a cue phrase, such as, *Deep relaxation or I am relaxed.*

•Inhale easily and naturally while mentally counting one, two, three. Then exhale while counting to yourself, three, two, one.

•While you are exhaling, let your jaw, tongue and shoulders all go loose. Feel a wave of limpness, heaviness and warmth flowing down your body to your toes. ■

Dr. Gerald Epstein

Mount Sinai Medical Center

You Can Beat Allergies Through Mental Imagery

Millions of Americans with allergies make regular trips to their physicians for dietary prescriptions, weekly injections, air filters and other standard treatments. Yet few sufferers ever find true relief.

Reason: Although it's widely known that the mind exerts a powerful influence on our physical well-being, most doctors treat allergies as a strictly physical problem. **What they're missing:** In many cases, allergic symptoms are a physical manifestation of an emotional or social problem. And allergies that do stem primarily from physical factors are often complicated by emotional factors.

POWER THROUGH KNOWLEDGE

Dr. Suzanne Oparil

University of Alabama

Blood-Pressure Numbers What they really mean

If you're one of the 57 million Americans with high blood pressure, you probably keep careful track of your blood-pressure readings. But do you really know what they mean? The figures contain important information that your doctor uses to choose a course of treatment.

As blood is pumped by your heart throughout your body, it presses against the walls of your blood vessels.

When the heart beats, it sends out a surge of blood, raising the pressure within the arteries and the smaller blood vessels branching off from them.

When the heart rests between beats, the pressure drops.

The higher pressure, when the heart is pumping, is called *systolic*.

The lower pressure, when the heart rests, is called *diastolic*.

The two figures are written as a fraction with the systolic on top and the diastolic below.

A person with normal blood pressure would have a reading in the range of 110–140 systolic and 60–90 diastolic.

Although you would know it if your body temperature rose or if your heart rate increased, your blood pressure can reach dangerously high levels without your feeling a thing. **Self-defense:** Blood pressure should be maintained at a level that is healthy for you, as determined by your physician. ■

Health Confidential interviewed Suzanne Oparil, MD, director, Hypertension Program, University of Alabama at Birmingham.

A NEW LOOK AT ALLERGIES

Allergies, regardless of their origin, are identical in one respect. Allergies always represent a person's efforts—unwanted as they might be—to rid the body of certain aversive substances (allergens).

What the body deems aversive, of course, varies from person to person. For many it's pollen or other airborne contaminants. But it might also be radon gas seeping up from the floor...dairy products...sunscreen additives...pets...or even other human beings.

Example: One man came to me complaining of multiple allergies only to discover that he was really allergic to certain family members. The mere presence of these relatives was enough to trigger sneezing and a runny nose.

In other cases, allergic reactions are brought on simply by the sound of another person's voice or a particular hand gesture.

WHAT TO DO

The most effective way to cure an allergy is simply to eliminate the allergen altogether. Unfortunately, this is impossible in many cases. **Alternate solution:** The body must be trained to respond differently in the presence of the allergen.

Mental imagery is often helpful in this regard. **Procedure:** The moment you find yourself troubled by allergic symptoms,

Health Confidential interviewed Gerald Epstein, MD, on the psychiatry faculty at Mount Sinai Medical Center, New York. He has worked for more than 25 years in imagery, psychoanalysis, mental health and the related disciplines of hypnosis, dream work and meditation. Dr. Epstein, who also maintains a private practice in New York, is the author of *Healing Visualizations: Creating Health through Imagery*, Bantam Books, 666 Fifth Ave., New York 10103. \$8.95.

close your eyes and imagine your allergy in visual terms.

Example: I see myself standing in a field and an enormous wave of pollen is coming toward me.

If no image comes to mind immediately, be patient. An image eventually will come into focus. Once it does, create a mental image that remedies this threatening situation.

Example: Imagine being encased in a big protective bubble filled with blue light. The wave of pollen simply bounces off, leaving you unaffected.

Such imagery interrupts the immune-system cycle that can lead to allergic symptoms.

Another visualization: Imagine a pristine garden underneath a clear blue sky. Walk through this garden peacefully, drinking it all in. Smell the flowers, feel the warm breeze blowing gently across your skin and hear the calls of colorful birds. Now imagine a white picket fence surrounding the entire garden. This fence protects you against any unwanted intrusions—including any allergic symptoms.

Countless such scenarios are possible. The best are those that spring spontaneously to mind rather than those suggested by someone else.

Whatever scenario and whatever remedy you devise, concentrate on them and be confident that you will be protected against any unpleasant allergic symptoms.

To keep allergies at bay, perform these visualizations for one to two minutes, at least four times daily. Keep this routine up for 21 days. Then stop for a few days to see if the allergic symptoms resurface.

If symptoms do not recur, consider yourself cured...no more visualizations are necessary. If, however, they do recur, another 21-day cycle of visualizations is in order.

PERMANENT RELIEF

Although visualizations provide temporary relief from allergies, no allergy remedy is complete until all possible contributory factors have been explored—and corrected.

Example: In the case of the man allergic to his family, this necessitated sessions with


Coming in *Health Confidential*

How to protect yourself from a silent killer: Passive smoking...Why excess hairiness can be a sign of serious disease...Debunking the common myths of aging...Fabulous fat-free food finds...What we can learn from the Japanese about fighting the war against cancer...Putting an end to stubborn yeast infections.

those members who were contributing to the trouble. In these sessions, the family explored those aspects of their interactions that were creating the friction that, in turn, was giving rise to his allergies. What was needed to alleviate allergies was more effective communication. No medicines, no shots.

The process of correcting mistaken communication patterns differs from regular psychotherapy. Psychotherapists focus on helping clients understand certain patterns of behavior. I focus instead

on ways to correct those patterns. To heal an allergy, it takes a sensitive medical practitioner. Often such practitioners are not necessarily well-known allergists, but professionals outside conventional medicine—acupuncturists, chiropractors, osteopaths, homeopaths, etc.

If you have difficulty locating such a practitioner, contact the American Holistic Medical Association, 2727 Fairview Ave. E., Seattle 98102. 

DERMATOGLYPHICS

Dr. Robert J. Meier, *Indiana University*

Palm Reading & Sole Reading What Your Hands and Feet Say About Your Health

A fascinating field of scientific research, dermatoglyphics, could one day help doctors identify people who are at high risk for developing diseases, including rheumatoid arthritis and breast cancer. Such diseases, scientists theorize, may be predicted by unusual patterns on the palms of the hands or the soles of the feet.

To find out more about this connection, *Health Confidential* asked one of the country's foremost authorities on the subject...

What exactly is dermatoglyphics?

It's the study of the epidermal ridge surface—the lines and marks—of the fingers, palms, toes and soles. These are the only parts of the body that have these particular markings.

What's the connection between these surfaces and disease?

During the prenatal period, while the fetus is developing, disturbances that originate from genetic or environmental sources may produce a defect or place the person at risk for developing a defect later in life.

Those defects that do originate at the end of the first trimester—when the dermatoglyphic features are forming—may show up in a person's dermatoglyphics.

How will doctors be able to use dermatoglyphics?

Dermatoglyphics could potentially be used to screen newborns for birth defects. It's already moderately successful for diagnosing babies born with Downs syndrome and abnormal numbers of sex chromosomes, which causes growth and developmental problems.

What does the palm of someone with Downs syndrome look like?

A common feature is an unusual crease that runs straight across the

palm, from side to side. Although this crease occurs in normal people about 2% of the time, it has been observed in 50% of all people suffering from Downs syndrome.

Can you offer any other examples that doctors are now using?

No other findings have been nearly as consistent or proved as well. But other important associations have been found.

Example: One study has indicated that women with an unusual number of whorl patterns on the tips of their fingers have a greater likelihood of going on to develop breast cancer.


Important: Dermatoglyphics should only be used as a supplement to more reliable diagnostic procedures.

What other disorders are dermatoglyphicists (scientists interested in the study of dermatoglyphics) exploring?

We believe that we may one day be able to predict who is at risk for developing dyslexia, childhood leukemia, schizophrenia, hyperactivity, rheumatoid arthritis, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, lupus, alcoholism, cirrhosis of the liver...even gastrointestinal disorders.

But large groups of people will have to be studied before we can establish statistical associations between skin patterns and specific disorders.

How could diagnosing a person with abnormal ridge patterns prove helpful?

If we can identify them early, those people who are at high risk for developing a specific disease could be advised to take preventive measures, watch for the development of symptoms and get regular exams. 

Health Confidential interviewed Robert J. Meier, PhD, professor of anthropology, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. He is one of the country's foremost authorities on anthropological dermatoglyphics.