







## Can stress management techniques help control allergies?

People with allergic conditions, be it asthma, dermatitis, or urticaria, may experience worsening of their condition or more frequent flare-ups when exposed to psychological stress. The triggers may include conflicts with friends or family, a career change, financial problems, and other major events. Life is life...But can anything be done to reduce the risk of flare-ups and avoid additional medications?







Researchers from China surveyed 28,144 people to investigate whether stress management skills can influence the risk of new episodes of pre-existing allergic conditions under stress.

### Study design

 Data collection and analysis	Step 1. Patients filled in a detailed questionnaire	Step 2. Self-reported diagnosis was verified in the patient's medical records	Step 3. Statistical analysis and conclusions
 Surveyed patients (from 6 randomly selected cities in Guangdong province, China)	N = 28 144 people (83.01% response rate)		
	 14,653 (52.06%)	 13,491 (47.94%)	
Key characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ ≥ 18 years old</li> <li>✓ Allergic rhinitis, atopic dermatitis, asthma or bronchitis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Intake of medications to control allergic disease in the previous 2 weeks</li> <li>✗ Pregnancy or lactation</li> <li>✗ History of serious chronic disease</li> </ul>	
 Stressful life events	<b>Disease or death</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal injury or illness</li> <li>• Severe disease of family member or close friend</li> <li>• Death of family member or close friend</li> </ul>	<b>Conflicts in personal relationships</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpersonal disharmony</li> <li>• Family discord</li> <li>• Marital disruption</li> <li>• Trouble from children</li> <li>• Split up from boyfriend or girlfriend</li> </ul>	<b>Life changes or other events</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overwork</li> <li>• Economic plight</li> <li>• Career change</li> <li>• Living environment change</li> <li>• Lifestyle change</li> <li>• Suffer a criminal or civil penalty</li> </ul>
 Stress management skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Concentrate on pleasant thoughts at bedtime”</li> <li>• “Pace myself to prevent tiredness”</li> <li>• “Get enough sleep”</li> <li>• “Take some time for relaxation each day”</li> <li>• “Balance time between work and play”</li> <li>• “Accept those things in my life that I cannot change”</li> <li>• “Use specific methods to control stress”</li> <li>• “Practice relaxation or meditation for 15–20 min daily”</li> </ul>		

Once the researchers gathered all the data, they conducted a statistical analysis to investigate the connection between how well people manage stress and their experiences with allergies against different life events.

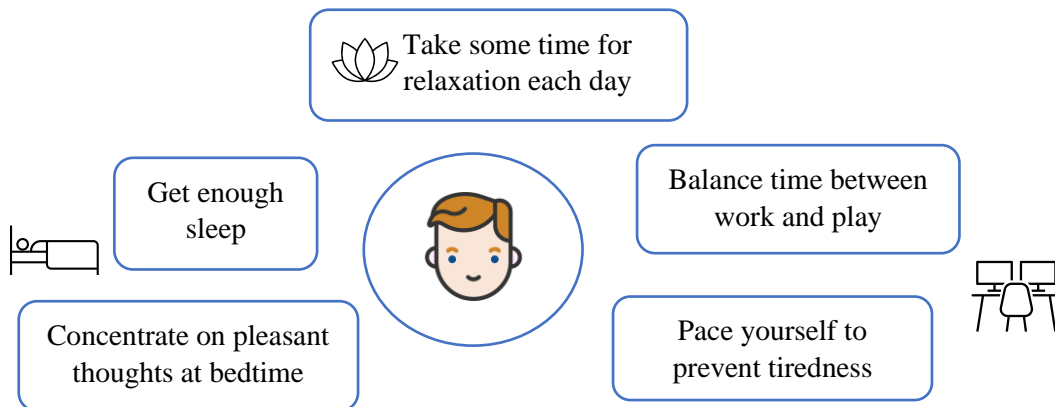
### Results

 Sample for analysis (all patients who matched the enrollment criteria)	<b>1340</b> participants with allergies	<b>2662</b> healthy control participants
 The more stressful events, the higher the risk of allergic episode	$\geq 3$ stressful events $\rightarrow$ 2.5 to 3.7-fold increase of a risk of an allergic episode	
 Stress management skills that help relax and reduce fatigue had significantly increased the risk of allergic episode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Concentrate on pleasant thoughts at bedtime”</li> <li>• “Pace myself to prevent tiredness”</li> <li>• “Get enough sleep”</li> <li>• “Take some time for relaxation each day”</li> <li>• “Balance time between work and play”</li> </ul>	
 Risk of an allergic episode was the highest in patients with poor stress management skills who experienced stressful events	The risk increased 2-fold as compared to patients who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- did not experience any stressful events</li> <li>- had better stress managements skills</li> </ul>	

Surprisingly, the researchers discovered that when people experienced low levels of psychological stress, their stress management skills made no difference for the course of an allergic disease. However, it's still worthwhile to enhance these skills as a preventive measure.

## Conclusion

Under stress, your body’s protection against allergens lowers. To prevent flare-ups of your allergic disease, you can try:



Reference: Cheng J, Li F, Lai Y, Chen J, Sun X, Xiang L, Jiang P, Wu S, Xiao Y, Zhou L, Luo R, Zhao X, Liu Y. Association of stress management skills and stressful life events with allergy risk: a case-control study in southern China. BMC Public Health. 2021 Jun 30;21(1):1279. doi: 10.1186/s12889-021-11333-3. PMID: 34193097; PMCID: PMC8247235.

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