



## **Introduction**

An allergy is a hypersensitive reaction to an otherwise harmless substance in the environment. The allergic individual may thus react adversely to a wholesome food, a grass pollen, or an animal dander. Indeed, the number of potential candidates here is endless; for it is possible to be allergic to anything under the sun - including the sun! The reactions themselves are equally diverse, ranging from simple itch to a potentially fatal collapse. Between these two extremes, there lies an excess of misery: the 'constant cold', sinus trouble, skin rash, and so the list goes on. Allergy, in the broadest sense of the word, is also said to play a part in many other ailments, such as hyperactivity, migraine, arthritis, and chronic fatigue, to name but a few. Furthermore, allergic reactions may vary enormously from one patient to the next, and even within the same patient at different times. Thus, one person may sneeze in the presence of a horse, and another may wheeze. They are both allergic to the same thing, but they have very different reactions to it. Similarly, some allergies occur dramatically, within seconds of exposure to the offending agent; whereas others are more cumbersome, and take days or even weeks to develop. The former are usually well known to the patient, but the latter are seldom so.

Allergy is indeed a vast and fascinating field, replete with complexity and intrigue. This is, perhaps, the reason why it has become so entangled in controversy, and so muddled in the minds of doctor and patient alike. The greatest conflict arises between two schools of medical thought. The first relies heavily on objective tests, and

maintains that ‘if we cannot show the *mechanism* of an allergy (by skin-prick or blood test), then it’s not an allergy’. The contrasting view is empirical, and much more comprehensive. It depends, not on theory, but on what we call clinical observation and experiment. ‘If you get a symptom from an ‘otherwise harmless’ substance, you are (to put it simply) allergic to it’. In this case, it does not matter whether we can understand the mechanism, it simply matters that we observe a symptom.

The strength of the first position is that it is built on ‘hard science’. But herein also lies its’ weakness. As you can imagine, it is very reassuring to have a reliable test which gives objective evidence of allergy. It makes the job a lot easier! However, we cannot dismiss a suspected allergy on the basis of our present inability to ‘prove it’ in the laboratory. To do so would be to fall headlong into a scientific trap - a dark place where otherwise brilliant minds are restricted by the limitations of their machines. The purely scientific approach to allergy tests will lead to some patients being told that they are *not* allergic when, in fact, they *are*! Conversely, the broader proposition is founded on the art, rather than the science of medicine. Once again, herein lie strength and weakness together. It is strong because it will consider greater possibilities. It will not dismiss what it cannot understand, and consequently, will not easily ‘miss’ an allergy. It is weak because it cannot always prove the truth of its’ own diagnosis, and because it is prone to all the variables of human nature. In particular, it is vulnerable to the placebo effect: a mysterious, beguiling and often potent human response to the power of suggestion. In this case, some patients will be told that they *are* allergic when, in fact, they are *not*!

Although these opposing views are sometimes violently held, I believe that they both offer something to the allergic patient. In practice, it is possible to marry the warring factions. We can, with common sense, glean all that is good from each side of the argument and use it to our own advantage. By this means, I hope that you will develop a clear understanding of your own allergies. The great advantage of such knowledge is, of course, obvious: you can deal with the root cause of your symptoms, rather than suffer them, or mindlessly suppress them with drugs. With this principal, we have a new and exciting avenue to explore in the search for permanent relief of hitherto intractable symptoms.

There is, however, one other source of confusion which must be addressed. I refer to the sheer bedlam generated in recent years by unqualified 'allergists'. These are self-appointed and unregulated practitioners who use very dubious 'tests' to tell unsuspecting patients what they are 'allergic to' - usually a long list of foods. Many patients have followed prolonged and austere regimes on the basis of these 'results'. They will have done so with great expectation; and although some fortuitously improve, most obtain little or no benefit.

The fact that so many intelligent people adhere to these punishing diets is simply a measure of how desperate they are to rid themselves of symptoms. I admire them. They are pro-active. They assume responsibility for their own health. They also display great determination in their search for a better quality of life - a life free from the constant harassment of sickness. Besides, their own doctors may not have been able to help, or may have failed to take them seriously when they enquired about allergy. Perhaps they were dismissed on the grounds of a negative blood test! This

being so, they sought help where they thought they might find it. Desperation, however, is always a precarious state of mind. Diets ‘prescribed’ without medical or dietetic knowledge have resulted in many cases of nutritional deficiency. Tragically, there have also been a number of malnutrition-related deaths. How distressing it is when the innocent fall into the hands of the unscrupulous.

The essential question, then, is this: are *your* symptoms -whatever they may be - caused by a hypersensitive reaction to something ‘otherwise harmless’ in your environment; and if so, how can we pin-point, exactly and reliably, what it is that causes you such grief? Finally, having identified your allergies, what can you do to secure a healthy and symptom-free future? The aim of this book is to provide you with clear answers to these very important questions. Indeed, you may discover that you have no allergies at all! In that case you will at least know that your answer lies elsewhere.