

Dust Mite Allergy Triggers Cough

DEAR DR. ROACH: For months, I have had a persistent cough that I have been unable to get help with. I saw an allergist about three years ago and was told I am allergic to dust mites. I was first referred to a lung doctor where X-rays showed that my cheek sinus drains were completely blocked, and then to an ear, nose and throat doctor, who also confirmed this diagnosis.

This ENT doctor recommended I have surgery to unblock the drains and clear out the sinus area. I understand that sinus drainage can cause coughing and wonder if this would still make me cough. I sometimes cough until I can cough up something, and this seems to stop my cough for a while. I was using a nasal rinse for a while until about two weeks ago when it caused my nose to bleed. The ENT doctor prescribed antibiotics and oral steroids that did not make any difference. It doesn't seem to make any difference whether I'm home or sitting in the doctor's office, I'm still coughing. What is the best way to deal with dust mite allergy? -- J.S.

ANSWER: There are many causes of chronic cough, but postnasal drip is at the top of the list. Dust mites are indeed a common allergen, and symptoms may include runny nose, watery eyes, sneezing and cough from postnasal drip. Specific treatment for dust mites should include physical barriers, such as covers for pillows and mattresses, and sometimes for other soft surfaces, like furniture cushions, but this is only part of an effective strategy. Removing as many fabrics as possible (draperies, carpets, stuffed children's toys) where dust mites can live is essential. Regular cleaning is necessary, and high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters for vacuuming have been shown to reduce dust mites. A low-humidity environment can be very effective in discouraging dust mites, and cooler air -- especially at night -- can reduce irritation of nasal passages caused by dry air. Many interventions for a prolonged period are necessary to reduce dust mite infestation and the symptoms associated with them.

This is critical, because the issue of the sinuses is probably secondary to ongoing allergic exposure. Fixing your sinuses will not fix your ongoing symptoms. Without control of the allergens, you will continue to have symptoms and may even develop sinus blockages again, no matter how good a job the surgeon does on your sinuses.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am 90 years old. My husband and I donated blood as often as needed, over 100 times, but last week my doctor said I tested positive for syphilis. I about fell off my chair. I haven't slept for four nights. Have you ever heard of this? -- E.

ANSWER: The screening test for syphilis, called the VDRL or RPR test, is not particularly accurate. About 1-2% of people will have a false positive result. Meaning, the test is positive but they do not have syphilis. There are many possible causes, such as infection and autoimmune disease, like lupus, but some people, particularly older people, will have a positive test for no identifiable reason.

In your case, I am sure it is a false positive, but your doctor may do a more specific test, such as an FTA-ABS, to be 100% sure. You shouldn't let it keep you awake at night.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

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The Smear Campaign Against Joe Manchin

Joe Manchin is being pilloried for the offense of being consistent on the filibuster.

Back in 2017, when Senate Democrats were desperate to stop Donald Trump's agenda, 33 of them, including Manchin, signed a bipartisan letter backing the filibuster in ringing terms.

"We are mindful of the unique role the Senate plays in the legislative process," they wrote, "and we are steadfastly committed to ensuring that this great American institution continues to serve as the world's greatest deliberative body."

Well, the commitment of almost all the Democrats was not quite as steadfast as advertised.

Now that the filibuster is an obstacle to passing Joe Biden's agenda, the longstanding Senate procedure has been deemed a threat to our system of government and to racial justice that only a naïf or cynic can support.

And that means you, Joe Manchin.

The West Virginia senator has been badgered for months by reporters eager to get him to change his mind on the filibuster, or at least show some flexibility. Now, the pressure campaign from within his own party has ratcheted up to include over-the-top insults that have an air of desperation about them.

After Manchin reiterated his support for the filibuster and made clear his opposition to HR1, a sweeping Democratic voting bill, in an op-ed that weekend, progressive House Democratic Mondaire Jones from New York unloaded on Twitter. Per Jones, the headline of Manchin's piece might as well have been, "Why I'll vote to preserve Jim Crow."

This is a preposterous smear, and a transparent attempt to bludgeon Manchin into submission by defining his sincere attachment to Senate tradition and belief in bipartisanship as tantamount to racism.

Another New York member of the House, Jamaal Bowman, said on CNN, "Joe Manchin has become the new Mitch McConnell."

The comparison might make sense if Mitch McConnell had voted with Joe Biden 100% of the time so far, and had supported the Affordable Care Act and voted twice to impeach President Donald Trump.

Despite the abuse, Manchin is onto something. The current situation illustrates the purpose of the filibuster nicely -- it is a guardrail keeping a very slender Senate majority that could easily be wiped out by January 2023 from enacting a far-reaching radical agenda in a fit of partisan passion.

Democrats aren't mad because they know that support for their agenda will build over time -- they are mad because they know that it won't, and absent Manchin and other recalcitrant Senate Democrats getting on board right away, they will miss their tiny window to get their way through brute legislative force prior to losing one or both chambers of Congress.

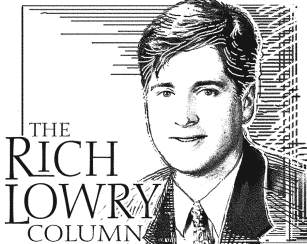
They have convinced themselves that GOP state legislatures are destroying democracy with new voting laws rolling back pandemic-driven innovations and tightening up security, a fevered myth that also won't stand the test of time.

As for HR1, it is a constitutionally dubious monstrosity that would trample on state voting laws in an enormous step toward the federalization of American elections. Manchin was right to say in his op-ed that it is telling that not one Republican, whether Susan Collins or Mitt Romney, is supporting this partisan power grab.

Manchin isn't always as stalwart in standing up to his own party as he sounds, but he's been remarkably firm so far. His role as a senatorial brake on Biden's left-wing ambitions has certainly made him more popular back home, and the progressive slanders against him will only boost his political standing. The left will get nowhere if it tries to primary him in 2024 (assuming he decides to run again), and if he did lose to a more progressive Democrat, Republicans would easily win his seat.

Surely, the attacks on Manchin will only get more venomous. Such is the price of refusing to reverse himself on the filibuster and get on board a sprawling travesty of a voting bill.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.
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Trump 'Reinstated'

A typical day in the Divided States of America: The New York Times is reporting that Donald Trump -- in case you've forgotten, the previous president -- has been telling friends and associates that he will be "reinstated" by August.

"He can simply be reinstated," Sidney Powell told a meeting of QAnon, whose slogan is "Where the inmates run the asylum." "Biden is told to move out of the White House, and President Trump should be moved back in," she went on. "I'm sure there's not going to be credit for time lost, unfortunately, because the Constitution itself sets the date for inauguration, but he should definitely get the remainder of his term and make the best of it."

Never mind that the Constitution sets a four-year term for the presidency, "reinstate" is the trending word these days in wild and wacky Trumpworld.

"It is my hope that Donald Trump is reinstated, after all the proof comes out, by the end of August," said Mike Lindell, the My Pillow Guy, who has strange dreams. By the way, he first made his declaration on Steve Bannon's podcast. Need I say more?

And Lindell is taking credit for predicting Trump's triumphant return, although he thinks that Trump would have to go through the judicial process. And never mind that the Supreme Court refused to consider every effort to even hear Trump's fantasy that the election was stolen from him, a belief he allegedly still holds to this day. If so, his next project might be renaming his residence the Mar-a-Lago-Madhouse. It's more probable that he's really too embarrassed to admit he lied about the whole thing.

Whichever it is, one of Trump's early cast of characters was Lt. Gen. Mike Flynn, his first national security adviser. Flynn didn't last very long, because he got caught lying to the FBI.

Well, after President Trump pardoned him, Flynn is still rattling around. He spoke at that same QAnon conference and had his own ideas for "reinstatement" ... a coup d'etat: "No reason, I mean, it should happen here. No reason. That's right." To be clear, he was responding to an audience member who was suggesting a military takeover, like Myanmar's. After an uproar, including calls for sedition prosecution, Flynn beat a hasty retreat on Parler, one of the only social media platforms available to him: "Let me be VERY CLEAR -- There is NO reason whatsoever for any coup in America, and I do not and have not at any time called for any action of that sort."

Remember that Flynn led the Defense Intelligence Agency from 2012 to 2014, until he was forced to retire from the military. It begs the question why he headed the powerful agency for two years during the Obama administration. But in 2016, he declared his allegiance to Donald Trump. His main function at Trump rallies was to whip the supporters into a frenzy, charging Hillary Clinton with all manner of crimes and leading the crowd in chants of "Lock her up!"

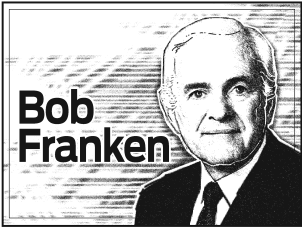
Don't worry; there is no evidence that Donald Trump will be "reinstated" by this August, or any other August through 2024. First of all, his successor Joe Biden enjoys a 54% job approval rating in the polls. Secondly, the job is methodically cleaning up the mess created by the Great Divider.

Trump's support, meanwhile, is slipping even among Republicans, who are possibly puzzled by the changing stories of their congressional leaders. For instance, they blocked an investigation into the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol, which could be considered the start of Flynn's coup.

Donald Trump's role in that debacle is still debated. Meanwhile, his participation in the Trump Organization's alleged scams and what transpired during his presidency probably won't lead to his "reinstatement" either, particularly while his legal status is so precarious. It's tough making a comeback while you're being prosecuted.

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