

## **LIVING A FULL LIFE WITH ALLERGY**

Does allergy control and limit your life? New winds are blowing in ways to deal with allergy. The message is clear: Allergy need not limit your life and daily choices unnecessarily. You and your family can live a full and happy life in spite of allergy when you change your attitude to it. Stop fearing allergy and do not avoid certain allergens and foods in order to prevent allergy. On the other hand, it is important to avoid allergens in inducing serious symptoms. Take a U-turn towards a natural, healthy life style that boosts your immunological tolerance. Instead of treating common and mild allergy symptoms with unnecessary medication, start focusing on allergy health – living a full life that strengthens your tolerance to allergens.

### **Strengthen your tolerance**

In allergy, a person's immune system is out of balance. To function properly, the immune system needs challenges which are no longer provided by modern city life. All open-air activities, such as walking in the woods, camping, gardening, and taking your children to play in the park are good for you because they bring you in contact with nature, birds, pollens, bacteria and other microbes in the soil. You can also stop obsessing about cleaning your home, for too much hygiene is not good for immunological tolerance either. Remember to do physical exercise regularly, for it strengthens your immunity. And embrace life, even if it means getting a little dirty now and then.

Avoiding certain foods to prevent allergies is no longer recommended. Today, the number of children on special diets is far too high. A food avoidance diet can endanger a child's intake of important nutrients, increase the risk of dangerous allergic reactions, and distort your child's relationship with food. Breastfeed your baby as long as you can, but you can start feeding solid foods as soon as the baby is 4-6 months old. And you can strengthen your own immunity with a healthy diet, such as the Mediterranean one, or the diet traditionally used in the Baltic countries.

If your child wants a pet, you no longer have to say No. According to latest scientific evidence, getting exposed to animals strengthens children's immunity.

Good air quality is important. Stop smoking. Now.

### **Detect and treat severe allergies early**

These new recommendations do not intend to belittle or ignore people's allergic symptoms — on the contrary. It is crucial to detect and treat severe allergies early, to stop the disease from getting worse. Allergy is the most common chronic disease in Europe, but most patients have only mild or seasonal symptoms. By strengthening their tolerance and controlling mild and common allergy symptoms proactively, people can help health care professionals focus on treating the high-risk patients promptly.

### **The Finnish Allergy Programme**

These were some of the messages heard during a seminar arranged by the European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Association (EFA) on 8-9 November 2012 in Helsinki, Finland. The purpose of the seminar was to introduce other EFA member countries to the experiences gained during the four first years of the Finnish Allergy Programme 2008-2018, a unique nationwide educational action plan that aims to reduce the individual and societal burden of allergies.