

ALLERGIES AND NLP

IS IT SAFE TO RISK IT?

by Eve Menezes Cunningham

As an NLP and EFT Practitioner, I know that both techniques can help people with allergies. But as someone with a severe allergy to peppers, I'm especially concerned about the risks.

I don't remember ever eating peppers as a child but, as a teenager, if there were any peppers in my food, I would be sick. I'd also be sick if someone was cooking peppers and the smell was too strong.

When I've accidentally had a tiny trace (when it has been on the plate or the wrong cutlery has been used) I've ended up feeling as if I'm about to die. My head, mouth and throat swell up and it's taken up to 48 hours to feel OK again. I've never been hospitalised and know that peppers are much easier to avoid than nuts but it does make eating out awkward.

So the idea of getting rid of my allergy is appealing but I don't think I'd ever risk eating anything with



peppers in it. Still, it would be brilliant to not have such strong reactions. Then again, the strength of these involuntary reactions is useful in that it's probably what's kept me out of hospital. Nuts don't smell very strongly and I have a friend who has eaten quite large quantities unknowingly (resulting in lots of time in hospital).

INLPTA Trainer, Bob Roberts, MBE, says, "Allergies are to do with the immune system getting out of control. Our unconscious mind has control over our immune system. As we know, when we're run down and stressed out, we're more likely to get a cold, because the stress has depressed our immune system defences. Logically, it follows that as NLP has techniques to connect with and influence our unconscious mind, then NLP techniques can also be a way to directly influence our immune system."

Muriel Simmons, Chief Executive of medical charity Allergy UK, is far from convinced. She says, "I can understand how it could help in cases of intolerance but where the immune system is involved, as it is in an allergic reaction, it's highly dangerous to mess round with that. People could die. NLP could assist someone with a true allergic reaction in helping them to cope."

I know that in the years since I started coaching and using NLP, I've felt more much more resourceful when it comes to going out for meals and stating my needs more assertively.

Muriel says, "There has to be an acceptance that there isn't a cure for allergies at all. The nearest hope we have is for people suffering from hayfever and that's immunotherapy. By steadily increasing dose of the allergen you're allergic to – e.g., grass and cats. At one time, it meant going into hospital for weekly



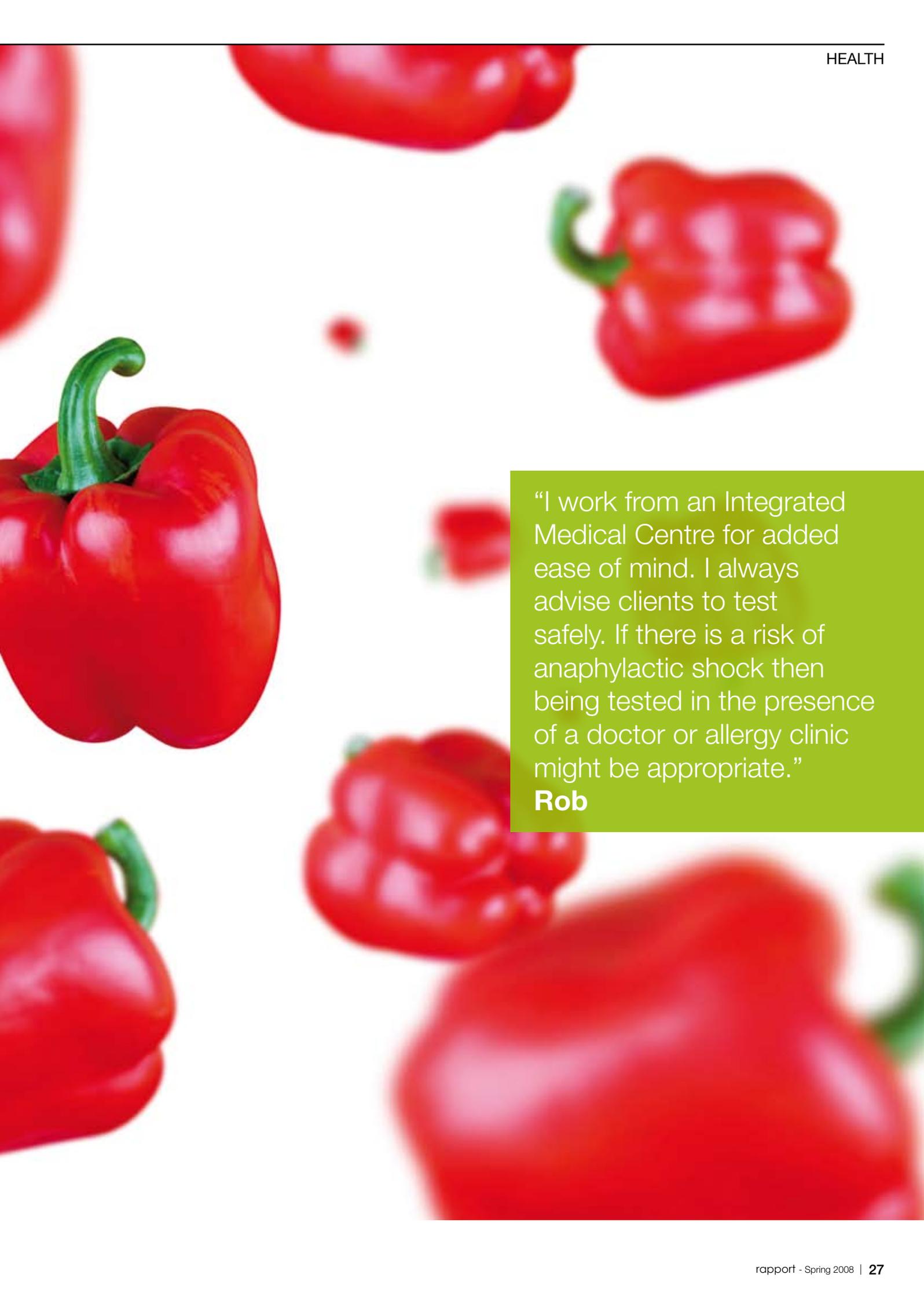
or monthly injections. It is reckoned to stop the allergy for five years and by this time, the immune system has usually righted itself."

Muriel is highly allergic to garlic. She says, "It is used in so many things and so commonly used that it makes eating out a nightmare. And as it is not one of the most common allergens, I go round the supermarket with a magnifying glass. I pre-order meals when I can from restaurants."

June Sayer runs the Sunningdale Complementary Health & Training Centre in Southend on Sea, Essex and offers allergy and intolerance testing. She says, "Testing for intolerances with the Vegatest machine is a painless, non-invasive procedure. The client holds a cylindrical electrode in one hand and the practitioner holds a pen-type stylus. Light pressure is applied to an acupuncture point on the client's finger or toe initially identifying their neutral reading. Because an allergy is caused by an abnormally high response of the immune system, we have found that using a combination of homoeopathic remedies and nutritional advice, our clients report a reduction in their sensitivity." June doesn't recommend this for children under 8, pregnant patients or anyone with a pacemaker. She also warns that being dehydrated can skew results.

Rob Mesrie of Allergy Alternatives is an NLP Master Practitioner and a member of the Institute for Advanced Studies of Health (IASH) and The Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health. He has been helping people with allergies since 2003.

Rob says, "There are various medical tests – blood tests, RAST tests and others – that indicate whether there is an allergy or not. They are only indicators but I have to recommend that those who used to have severe



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conditions are tested by allergy medics. But the real proof is in the pudding – when a person (accidentally or otherwise) actually comes into contact with the allergen. Often, medical tests show whether there are antibodies in the blood. When a person who was allergic to egg has an omelette and is OK, this is the real proof as to NLP's ability to make a difference.

“Before beginning to look at the concept of an NLP intervention, it is important to get a basic understanding of what goes on in the immune system when a person has an allergic reaction. Allergies are a response by the immune system to a perceived threat. That threat isn't as real as one might think. Dr Michael Levi described an allergy as a ‘phobic’ response of the immune system. And as we

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know, NLP has great ways of dealing with phobias.

“So an allergy occurs when the immune system detects what is perceived as a threat and then fights against it. The rash, swelling and all the symptoms are a result of this (excessive) reaction of the body to a perceived threat. If we change the perception of an allergen so that the body thinks of it as safe rather than harmful, then there is no more allergy and no more allergic response.

“The Fast Allergy Process was designed by Robert Dilts, Tim Hallbom and Suzi Smith to teach the immune system to behave more rationally. At the heart of a process is an anchor collapse. Although the process itself is rather simple, there are a few things that can get in the way. I find the biggest of these is a belief that allergies are somehow untreatable, ‘beyond help’ or ‘beyond nlp’.

“This is constantly reinforced by the media and the medical profession. So the whole idea that an allergy can be treated (let alone the concept that there are no drugs, injections or the like), can be hard to believe. So often the first step is loosening a clients model of the world and transforming their limiting beliefs.”

When I asked Rob about the caution needed and explained my own allergy and anaphylactic shock reactions even when a pepper has just touched my plate, he responded, “Hmmm - am I smelling the tails of a limiting belief?”

And I agree to a degree. But while it's a limiting belief that I feel is very useful for me, I also think the work being done with less severe allergies is quite inspiring. And Rob's not cavalier about the risks.

He says, “You are right that allergies should be approached with caution. I work from an Integrated Medical Centre for added ease of mind. I always advise clients to test safely. If there is a risk of anaphylactic shock then being tested in the presence of a doctor or

allergy clinic might be appropriate. With most clients, touching the allergen on the back of the hand might be a good first start. Then on the inside of the wrist, the outer lip, inner lip etc. For some, it may never be appropriate to test.

“One GP I worked with used to have reactions to mushrooms that were so severe that he would collapse unconscious in excruciating pain within minutes. Testing medically seemed like an appropriate step after our work. Before he had a chance to do the formal testing however, he was accidentally given soup containing mushrooms. It was only when he found some at the bottom of his bowl that he realised his mistake. Fortunately for him, the process had worked well and was a great convincer. In the process itself, its advisable to disassociate or double disassociate to make sure that it goes ahead safely.”

While I had assumed that it would be much easier to work with food intolerances than allergies, Rob says, “Food intolerances are a very different type of immune response to a food allergy. It's called an IgG rather than IgE response. To be honest, I don't find one easier than the other to work with. You are still

changing the response ‘from that’ to ‘this’.

“The only difference in the way I treat it is around the framing and the strength of the belief that this is a condition that can be treated. For a severe allergic response, ironically this is a good sign that the immune system is strong. Unfortunately it's just a little misguided.

“Be honest with yourself about any beliefs you may have around letting go of your allergy. Is it possible? Is it possible for you? Could it be easy? Your immune system learns new behaviours by itself every day. We are just giving it one extra lesson. Go through the process either with another practitioner or on your own. Suzi Smith has some CDs to lead you through the process and I'm recording a DVD. I have found the NLP Health Practitioner Course to be invaluable in my work with allergies and also with health issues in general. Test your results with an imaginary allergen. The success of the process is about treating the cause rather than the symptoms. If you really want to be of service, however, you might want to work with the cause of the cause - the cause of the conditions that led to the immune confusion.

“Often, with food intolerances, there is a long term emotional need that isn't being met. So as well as collapsing the anchor, it is important to address this and give strategies for meeting this need in the future.” Rob gives the example of an unusual allergy: “I once had a woman come to me with an allergy to ice cream. Not milk - just ice cream! When I asked her what would happen if she let go of her allergy, she told me she would devour ice cream and put on several stone. With that she got up and ran (before we had a chance to explore other possibly better strategies for staying thin).” ●

Resources

Steve Andreas has produced a video demonstrating interventions with wheat intolerance. Visit www.steveandreas.com

For information and support about allergies, visit www.allergyuk.org/

Contact Rob Mesrie through his website www.allergy-alternatives.com

Read *Beliefs: Pathways to Health and Wellbeing* by Robert Dilts, Tim Hallbom and Suzi Smith.

Find out more about allergy testing with June at www.sunningdalecentre.co.uk