

Hay fever (Seasonal allergic rhinitis)

Hay fever is a common condition also known as seasonal allergic rhinitis and affects around 1 in 5 people in the UK. It often runs in families and is more likely to affect people who suffer from asthma and eczema.

Symptoms include:

- Sneezing
- Itchy, blocked or runny nose
- Red, itchy, puffy or watery eyes
- Itchy throat
- Headaches and sinus pain
- Fatigue

It is an allergic condition where the body's immune system overreacts to substances that are usually harmless, for example pollen from grasses, flowers, weeds or trees. The pollen causes the release of a chemical called histamine from cells in the nose, eyes and airways, which cause inflammation. Some people suffer symptoms all year round; they can be allergic to indoor allergens such as house dust mites, pets and indoor moulds. This is called perennial allergic rhinitis.

Managing your hay fever

The severity of symptoms can vary, some people need medication to manage their symptoms and others can manage their condition by avoiding triggers. If treatment is needed a wide range of medications can be purchased from community pharmacies and supermarkets without seeing a doctor. **These medicines are often cheaper than medicines on prescription.**

How can I avoid triggers?

- Keep house and car windows closed, especially when the pollen counts are high (early morning between 7am to 9am and evenings between 5pm and 7pm).
- Avoid large grassy areas, woodland, cutting the grass, pollutants and car fumes.
- Wear wrap-around sunglasses.
- When you get in from outside wash your hands, face, hair, rinse your eyes and change your clothes.
- If possible stay indoors when the pollen count is high.
- Use petroleum jelly inside your nose to block inhalation of pollen.
- Keep your house clean and wear a mask and glasses when doing house work.
- Don't dry washing outside to avoid pollen sticking to your clothes.
- You could buy a pollen filter for the air vents in the car.

What treatments can I buy?

Speak to a local pharmacist to get advice on the best treatment for your symptoms and always read the patient information leaflet that is included with the medicine.

Examples of products available to buy include...

Antihistamine tablets and syrup

Generally effective at controlling symptoms of hayfever.

Antihistamines are more effective if they are taken before symptoms start rather than after.

Some older antihistamine tablets such as chlorphenamine can cause drowsiness. Newer antihistamines are unlikely to cause drowsiness and include cetirizine, loratadine, and acrivastine. If you drive or operate machinery ask the community pharmacist which tablets would be best for you.

Nasal sprays

Useful if you suffer nasal symptoms and can be used instead of, or in addition to, antihistamine tablets.

Steroid nasal sprays suppress the allergic reaction and inflammation of hay fever and take about 3 days to work. They are best started before the hay fever season begins and used throughout the season even if your symptoms have improved.

Antihistamine nasal sprays can be useful for people who have symptoms now and again.

Nasal decongestant sprays are useful if you suffer from a blocked nose, however they can only be used for 7 days as longer use can cause rebound congestion and block your nose up again. You may find inhalants (eucalyptus, menthol and Olbas Oil) helpful to ease blocked and stuffy noses.

Eye drops

If your eye symptoms are not controlled by oral antihistamines, eye drops containing sodium cromoglicate or lodoxmide may be useful.

If you wear contact lenses you should check with a community pharmacist or your optician before using eye drops.

Other useful treatments

Simple pain relief, e.g. paracetamol or ibuprofen, can help with headaches and sinus pain.

Throat lozenges can help ease tickly throats and palates.

Decongestant tablets should relieve blocked noses.

When should I see a GP?

- If you are experiencing wheezing, breathlessness or tightness in the chest.
- If you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- If your symptoms are not relieved by over the counter treatments in combination with measures to reduce your exposure to pollen.

More information is available at:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Hay-fever/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/hayfever/Pages/Hayfeverhome.aspx>

<http://www.patient.co.uk/health/hay-fever>