

## SELF-CARE INFORMATION ON HAY-FEVER

Hay fever is a common allergic condition caused by an allergic reaction to pollen. Pollen is a fine powder-like substance released by plants. When this fine powder encounters the cells that line your mouth, nose, eyes, and throat, they can irritate them and trigger an allergic reaction.

During an allergic reaction the body releases several chemicals that cause the symptoms of hay fever, such as *watering eyes* and a *runny nose*.

Hay fever is also called seasonal allergic rhinitis because symptoms tend to occur at the same time, or in the same season, each year, between late March and September and when it's warm, humid, and windy. This is when the pollen count is at its highest.

### Causes

Hay fever is an *allergic reaction* to pollen, typically when it comes into contact with your mouth, nose, eyes and throat. Specific pollens include *tree pollen*, released during spring, *grass pollen*, released at the end of spring and beginning of summer and *weed pollen*, released any time from early spring to late autumn.

### Symptoms

Symptoms of hay fever include:

- frequent sneezing and coughing
- a runny or blocked nose
- itchy, red or watery eyes (also known as allergic conjunctivitis)
- itchy throat, mouth, nose, and ears
- loss of sense of smell
- pain around your temples and forehead
- headache
- earache
- fatigue



If you have asthma, you might also:

- have a tight feeling in your chest
- be short of breath
- wheeze and cough

Hay fever will last for weeks or months, unlike a cold, which usually goes away after 1 to 2 weeks.

## Self-care at home

Treatments can ease your symptoms when the pollen count is high. Unfortunately, there is no cure for hay fever currently.

### **Things to help:**

- put Vaseline around your nostrils to trap pollen
- wear wraparound sunglasses to stop pollen getting into your eyes
- shower and change your clothes after you have been outside to wash pollen off
- stay indoors whenever possible
- keep windows and doors shut as much as possible
- vacuum regularly and dust with a damp cloth
- buy a pollen filter for the air vents in your car and a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter
- try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people if you have a high temperature or you do not feel well enough to do your normal activities

### **Things to avoid:**

- do not cut grass or walk on grass
- do not spend too much time outside when the pollen count is high
- do not keep fresh flowers in the house
- do not smoke or be around smoke – it makes your symptoms worse
- do not dry clothes outside – they can catch pollen
- do not let pets into the house if possible – they can carry pollen indoors

## Pharmacist treatments

Speak to your pharmacist if you have hay fever. They can give advice and suggest the best treatments, including:

- **Antihistamines**  
Antihistamines help block the effects of one of the chemicals released during an allergic reaction and so relieve symptoms such as itching, sneezing and watery eyes. They are available from pharmacies and supermarkets. They can cause drowsiness in some people. Examples include Cetirizine or Loratadine tablets.
- **Steroid nasal sprays**  
Steroid nasal sprays can help reduce levels of inflammation around the eyes and inside the nasal passages. They need to be used regularly and work best when started a couple of weeks before symptoms usually begin. Beclometasone nasal spray (brands include Beconase Hayfever Relief®) can be bought direct from the pharmacy.
- **Eye drops**  
Eye drops contain anti-inflammatory medicines and can be effective in the treatment of watery, itchy, and red eyes. An example is Sodium cromoglicate eye drops (brands include Allercrom® eye drops)

## When to contact your GP

Most cases of hay fever can be treated using medication from a pharmacy or supermarket.

If you are unclear which treatment would be best, or if you already take medication for other conditions, your local pharmacist can advise on appropriate treatments for you or your children.

You would normally only need to visit your GP practice if:

- You cannot control your symptoms with medications you have purchased, or you are having troublesome side effects caused by the medication.
- You are experiencing worsening of asthma or any shortness of breath.

- The pattern of your symptoms is unusual, such as occurring during the winter or only at your workplace. It is likely that a substance other than pollen is responsible and further testing may be required to confirm this.

Your GP may prescribe an alternative antihistamine or stronger steroid treatment.

### **Specialist treatments- Immunotherapy**

If steroids and other hay fever treatments do not work, your GP may refer you for immunotherapy. This means you'll be given small amounts of pollen as an injection or tablet to slowly build up your immunity to pollen. This kind of treatment usually starts in the winter about 3 months before the hay fever season begins. Immunotherapy is a specialist service that may not be available everywhere.

## ***Useful contacts***

- Ask your pharmacist
- Patient UK - [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)
- NHS Choices, [www.nhs.uk/conditions/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/)
- Get more tips on managing hay fever from Allergy UK <https://www.allergyuk.org/>

### ***If you have further questions:***

Call the **practice** on *01285 653184 or 01285 653122*

If you require **urgent** medical advice, call *111 (24 Hrs)*

In an **emergency** call **999**