

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.

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.

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.

The NHS has consulted with the public to identify areas to prioritise for continued investment. **Following this consultation, NHS advice is that if treatment is needed for mild to moderate symptoms of hay fever, this should be purchased from pharmacies, supermarkets and other stores. A wide range of medications are available from these outlets and a GP practice consultation should not be necessary in most cases.**

Symptoms include:

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

How can I avoid triggers?

- Keep house and car windows closed, especially when the pollen count is 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 housework.
- 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 particular symptoms and always read the patient information leaflet that is included with the medicine.

Examples of products available to buy include:

<p>Antihistamine tablets and syrup</p> <p>Generally effective at controlling symptoms of hay fever.</p>	<p>Antihistamines are more effective if they are taken before symptoms start rather than after. Some older antihistamine tablets such as chlorphenamine can cause drowsiness.</p> <p>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.</p>
<p>Nasal sprays</p> <p>Useful if you suffer nasal symptoms and can be used instead of, or in addition to, antihistamine tablets.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>Antihistamine nasal sprays can be useful for people who have symptoms now and again.</p> <p>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.</p>
<p>Eye drops</p>	<p>If your eye symptoms are not controlled by oral antihistamines, eye drops containing sodium cromoglicate may be useful, but these need to be started early, so discuss with your pharmacist</p> <p>If you wear contact lenses you should check with a community pharmacist or your optician before using eye drops.</p>
<p>Other useful treatments</p>	<p>Simple pain relief (e.g. paracetamol or ibuprofen) can help with headaches and sinus pain. Throat lozenges can help ease tickly throats. Decongestant tablets should relieve blocked noses but take advice from the pharmacist before using these.</p>

When should I see a member of the GP practice team?

- If you are experiencing wheezing, breathlessness or tightness in the chest.
- If you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- If you have already had a consultation with the community pharmacist and over the counter treatments in combination with measures to reduce your exposure to pollen

More information is available at: [NHS Choices](#) and [NHS Herefordshire & Worcestershire](#)