

Hay fever



What is it and how can I treat it?

Hay fever is caused by an allergy to pollen. It can affect people from March to October. The symptoms of hay fever - runny, itchy and/or blocked nose, sneezing, and itchy eyes - are caused by your immune system reacting to the pollen. Cells on the lining of the nose and eyes release histamine and other chemicals when they come in contact with pollen. This causes inflammation in the nose and eyes and sometimes the sinuses and throat can also be affected.

Hay fever is very common - it affects 1 in 5 people in the UK and it tends to run in families. But the good news is that in most cases it eventually goes away or improves.

The severity of symptoms can vary from person to person but most of the common symptoms can be treated using a variety of methods:

- antihistamine nose sprays
- antihistamine tablets
- steroid nose sprays
- eye drops

Most of these can be bought at your local pharmacy, supermarket or store. Own brand products are just as effective as branded products and are much more reasonably priced. They are often cheaper to buy than to have on prescription so avoid asking your GP for them.

Although it is impossible to totally avoid pollen, symptoms tend to be less severe if you reduce your exposure to it:

- Stay indoors as much as possible and keep windows and doors shut
- Avoid cutting grass, large grassy places, and camping
- Shower and wash your hair after being outdoors, especially after going to the countryside
- Wear wrap-around sunglasses when you are out
- Keep car windows closed, and consider buying a pollen filter for the air vents in your car. These should be changed at every service.

Visit www.nhs.uk for more information on hay fever.

If you would like a copy of this document in large print, Braille or on audio tape, or if you would like this information explained in another language please telephone 01707 369705.