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Allergic rhinitis

Department of Allergy

Information for Patients

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What is allergic rhinitis?

This is an allergic reaction. It happens when your immune system overreacts to allergens present in the air. The immune system then releases histamines and other chemicals.

There are 2 types of allergic rhinitis:

- **Seasonal allergic rhinitis:** This is when symptoms happen at a certain time of the year. They can be caused by an allergic reaction to pollen from grass, trees and weeds during the early spring and summer months. This type of allergic reaction is known as hay fever.
- **Perennial allergic rhinitis:** This is when symptoms are present all year round. They are triggered by an allergy to things that you might be exposed to at any time of the year such as house dust mites, pets, or mould.

Understanding the difference between these types can help identify triggers and manage symptoms effectively.

The symptoms include the following:

- Sneezing, blocked or runny nose
- Itchy eyes or throat
- Watering, red eyes (also known as allergic conjunctivitis)
- Headaches
- Blocked sinuses
- Tiredness
- Feeling of mucus running down the back of the throat (often called ‘postnasal drip’).

People can often have allergic rhinitis and asthma. Up to 4 in 10 people with rhinitis also have asthma. As the nose and lungs are joined and share the same tissue lining, it is important to treat asthma and rhinitis together as ‘one airway’. This can help improve asthma control in patients who have both conditions.

Treating allergic rhinitis

The treatment depends on how bad your allergic rhinitis is. You may use 1 or more of the following:

- **Steroid nasal spray.** This is used to reduce inflammation in the nose and relieve congestion.
- **Take medicine** used to relieve symptoms of allergies like antihistamine tablets. It is better to use antihistamines that do not make you drowsy (non-sedating). You can ask your pharmacist for advice on which may be best for you.
- **Use eye drops** for relief of any eye symptoms.

Where possible, try to avoid exposure to allergens that you know, or suspect is triggering your rhinitis.

In very severe cases where there is a single trigger such as grass pollen (hay fever), treatment to block the immune response to the allergen (known as immunotherapy) may be an option.

How to use a steroid nasal spray

A steroid nasal spray can help reduce inflammation and relieve congestion in your nose. It can take up to 2 weeks for it to work. During hay fever season, you should begin treatment at least 2 weeks before symptoms are expected to start:

1. Blow your nose.
2. Shake the bottle and remove the lid.
3. Tilt your head forward slightly, so you can see the top of your toes.
4. Using the opposite hand to the nostril being treated (such as right hand to left nostril). Put the end of the spray bottle just inside the nostril. Aim away from the middle of your nose and point it towards your ear.
5. Push down once to release a dose of the nasal spray.
6. Do not sniff. You should not taste the medicine.
7. Change hands and repeat the action in your other nostril.

More information:

Allergy UK Website: https://www.allergyuk.org/types-of-allergies/hayfever/

NHS website: https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/allergic-rhinitis/treatment/

Contact details

For any non-urgent queries, contact the Asthma and Allergy Nurse on **0116 258 3557**
Monday to Friday, 9am to 4.30pm, or contact your GP for advice.

Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice
Visit www.uhleicester.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals.
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net

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