

# Managing your hay fever

## Asthma and Allergy

### Information for Patients

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## What is hay fever?

Hay fever is also known as seasonal allergic rhinitis. It is caused by an allergy to tree, grass or weed pollen. Symptoms develop during the season. Symptoms can vary depending on the pollen type. For example grass pollen can be around the end of May until September. Tree pollen starts as early as February through to May, particularly when it is warm, humid and windy. Symptoms can go away as the season ends.

Hay fever symptoms are caused by pollen breathed into your nose and sometimes your lungs. Your body overacts and mistakes the pollen as harmful. Your body then releases chemicals (such as histamine) causing redness, rash, itch and swelling.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of hay fever can be one or more of the following:

- Blocked, runny, itchy nose and sneezing.
- Itchy, watery and red eyes.
- Headaches, facial pain and loss of concentration.
- Poor smell or taste and itchy back of the throat.

Symptoms may vary depending on how high the pollen level is and also from year to year. Hay fever will last for weeks or months unlike a cold which usually goes away after 1 to 2 weeks.

Hay fever may also trigger asthma in some people causing shortness of breath, chest tightness, wheezing and cough. If you have asthma and your symptoms get worse in hay fever season, you can follow your asthma action plan or see your GP for advice. If you experience these symptoms for the first time then you should also see your GP for assessment of your chest.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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To give feedback about this information sheet, contact [uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net](mailto:uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net)

## Tips to reduce triggers that make hay fever worse

Pollen is hard to avoid. These steps can help reduce the amount of exposure to it:

- Keep doors and windows closed. Make sure to do this in the morning and early evening as this is when pollen is at its highest level.
- Do not cut grass or walk in large grassy areas.
- Vacuum regularly using a vacuum with a special HEPA filter. Dust with a damp cloth.
- Shower to remove pollen from your skin and hair. Try not to dry clothes outdoors. They can catch pollen.
- Splash your eyes with cold water and wear wrap around sunglasses outdoors.
- Smear Vaseline inside your nose to help stop the pollen settling.
- Keep car windows closed and consider a pollen filter for the air vents in your car.
- Do not keep fresh flowers in the house.
- Do not smoke or be around smoke. It can make symptoms worse.
- Do not pet or stroke pets if possible. They carry pollen on their fur.
- Drink plenty of fluids. Dehydration can increase histamine production and worsen symptoms.

## Medicines and treatments for hay fever

- **Antihistamines:** These can help with symptoms of sneezing, itch and a runny nose. Some can cause tiredness (drowsiness). You cannot take them if you operate machinery. Many antihistamines are available in your local pharmacy or supermarket without prescription.
- **Nose sprays (corticosteroids):** These can help with sneezing, runny or blocked nose (congestion) that cannot be eased by antihistamines. You should start to use a nasal spray 2 weeks before hay fever season starts and continue throughout the season.
- **Eye treatments:** If you suffer from itchy, runny and swollen eyes, antihistamines can help. If symptoms continue, eye drops from your pharmacy or GP can also help. Splash your eyes with cool water.
- **Other treatment options:** If you are using the above treatment and your hay fever is still causing you distress, you should see your GP. A short course of steroid tablets may be prescribed. Referral to a hospital based allergy clinic may be advised if you have difficulty controlling your symptoms.
- **Desensitisation:** This is a treatment that encourages your body to gradually get used to the allergen over time. You are given small amounts of the allergen that causes your symptoms, over a 3 year period. This treatment is for people with severe hay fever symptoms that are not controlled by other medication.

## Nasal spray technique

Before first use, you will need to prime the nasal spray. You do this by holding the spray away from face and spray 2 to 5 times. Do this until a mist appears when you spray. You do this if you have not used it before, or if you have not used it for 2 weeks. Please make sure you follow the manufacturer's instructions.

- **Step 1:** Clean the nose by gently blowing or by rinsing your nose with salt-water (nasal douching). This removes mucus that would stop the medicated spray from reaching the nasal lining.
- **Step 2:** Tilt your head forward, placing your chin on your chest. This position closes off the back of the throat. It lets the spray reach the correct area inside the nose.
- **Step 3:** Hold the spray in the opposite hand to the nostril you are about to spray. For example, use the left hand to apply the spray in the right nostril. Use the right hand for the left nostril. This makes sure you aim the spray at the correct angle, pointing it away from the septum which has only a thin layer of membrane and can be easily damaged.
- **Step 4:** Place the end of the spray bottle just inside the nostril aiming away from the septum pointing to the ear or eye. This will make sure the spray is aimed toward the fleshy part of the nose which is often the main area of swelling in the nose.
- **Step 5:** Activate the spray. You may breathe in gently and steadily through your nose. **Do not sniff.** Sniffing can make you swallow or taste the medicine.
- **Step 6:** Breathe out through your mouth. Put the bottle into the opposite hand and repeat steps 4, 5 and 6 in the other nostril.

## More information

- Allergy UK: [www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org) / email: info@allergyuk.org / helpline: **01322 619 898**
- Asthma UK: [www.asthma.org.uk](http://www.asthma.org.uk) / helpline: **0300 222 5800** (Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm) or chat with
- Asthma UK nurse team through WhatsApp: **07378 606 728**

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