

Self Care Information:

HAY FEVER

SEASONAL ALLERGIC RHINITIS



This leaflet provides tips on how to manage your hay fever effectively

Your GP, Nurse or Pharmacist will no longer generally give you a prescription for the management of your hay fever symptoms, even if you qualify for free prescriptions

Did you know you do not need to see the doctor for hay fever symptoms?

Community pharmacists can offer advice on how to avoid triggers and how to treat your hay fever

You do not need a prescription for many hay fever medicines—many treatments are available at little cost from your community pharmacy

When should I see a GP?

- If your symptoms related to your hay fever are **not relieved** by over the counter treatments, in combination with measures to reduce your exposure to pollen.
- If you are **pregnant or breastfeeding**.

More information is available at:

- <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Hay-fever/Pages/Introduction.aspx>
- <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/hayfever/Pages/Hayfeverhome.aspx>
- <http://www.patient.co.uk/health/hay-fever>

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Hay fever is usually worse between late March and September, especially when it is warm, humid and windy. This is when the pollen count is at its highest.

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 to stop pollen getting into your eyes
- 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 (vacuum regularly) and wear a mask and glasses when doing house work.
- To avoid pollen sticking to your clothes, don't dry washing outside.
- You could buy a pollen filter for the air vents in the car.
- Don't keep fresh flowers in the house.
- If possible, don't let pets into the house as they can carry pollen indoors

What is Hay fever

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. Some people suffer symptoms all year round; they can be allergic to indoor allergens such as house dust mites, pets and indoor moulds. This is called **perennial** allergic rhinitis.

Symptoms include:

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

Managing your hay fever

Currently, there is no cure for hay fever, but you can do things to ease your symptoms when the pollen count is high. The severity of symptoms can vary; some people need medication to manage their symptoms and others can manage their condition by avoiding triggers. If treatment is needed a wide range of medications can be purchased from community pharmacies and supermarkets without seeing a doctor. These medicines are often cheaper than medicines on prescription.

What treatments can I buy?

Speak to a local pharmacist to get advice on the best treatment for your symptoms.

Remember to read the patient information leaflet that is included with the medicine.

Examples of products available to buy include:

Nasal sprays

Useful if you suffer nasal symptoms. Can be used instead of, or in addition to, antihistamine tablets.

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.

Antihistamine nasal sprays can be useful for people who have symptoms now and again.

Occasional use of **nasal decongestant sprays** can be 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.

Eye drops

If your eye symptoms are not controlled by oral antihistamines, eye drops containing **sodium cromoglicate** or **lodoxamide** may be useful.

If you wear **contact lenses** you should check with a **pharmacist or your optician before** using eye drops.

Antihistamine tablets and syrup

Generally effective at controlling symptoms of hay fever.

Antihistamines are more effective if they are taken before symptoms start rather than after. Some older antihistamine tablets such as **chlorphenamine** can cause **drowsiness**.

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.

Other useful treatments

- **Simple pain relief** (e.g. paracetamol or ibuprofen) can help with headaches and sinus pain.
- **Throat lozenges / boiled sweets** can help ease tickly throats and palates.
- **Decongestant tablets** can help relieve blocked noses.

Ask Your Pharmacist

- Always let them know if you take **any other medications** or have **any other conditions**, as this may affect what hay fever treatments you can use safely
- They will be able to help you decide what may be best for your symptoms
- They can also explain **when you should take** the medication you have purchased
- Ask your pharmacist for **non-branded** versions of medications, these often are **cheaper** to buy but may not always be on display.

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