

Hayfever

This fact sheet helps you to know what's 'normal' and what you can expect to happen if you suffer from Hayfever. It also tells you when you should become concerned and seek advice from a health professional.

Useful facts

- **What is Hayfever?** Hayfever is the common name given to cold like symptoms caused by inhaling plant pollens at certain times of the year. It is also known as seasonal allergic rhinitis.
- **How common is Hayfever?** Hayfever affects one in four people in the UK and approximately nine out of ten hayfever sufferers are allergic to grass pollen.
- **What's causing it?** When people who are allergic to plant pollen breathe it in, it causes the lining inside the airway to swell, this is called inflammation. It commonly affects the nose, eyes, throat and ears and can affect the lungs. This is due to the chemical, histamine, which the body releases when it thinks it's under attack from an allergen.

What can I expect to happen?

- ✓ **Duration** It occurs at particular times of the year when various plants release their pollen. Pollen is one of many allergens which can cause allergic responses.
- ✓ **Symptoms** Itchy nose, sneezing, blocked nose, watery discharge from the nose and sometimes eyes, poor quality sleep can all be caused by exposure to pollen and other allergens.
- ✓ **Impact on your life** Hayfever often starts in childhood and regularly occurs at the same time each year. Many people find their symptoms improve as they get older. Highly sensitive individuals can suffer hayfever symptoms even when the pollen count is low.

What can I do myself to get better – now and in the future?

- ✓ **Avoiding exposure** Avoid the countryside when the pollen count is high, keeping car windows shut if travelling. Wear wraparound sunglasses to stop pollen getting into your eyes when outdoors. Apply a small amount of Vaseline to the nasal openings to trap pollen grains.
- ✓ **Preventative measures** Keep the bedroom windows closed during early morning and evening when the pollen count is high. Alternatively, hide your pillow under the bed covers during the day to prevent pollen settling on it when the windows are open.
- ✓ **Educating yourself** The daily pollen count is broadcast by media outlets, along with the weather forecast and is reported as low, medium or high.

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- ✓ **Hygiene** Wash your face and hair and change clothes when coming indoors on days when the pollen count is high.
- ✓ **Antihistamines** Tablets, nasal sprays or eye drops block the actions of the histamine.
- ✓ **Steroids** Nasal sprays or drops reduce inflammation in the nose and can relieve itchy watery eyes. These work best when used regularly, and can take a couple of weeks to become maximally effective. Doctors do not generally recommend steroid injections as they have severe side effects. Occasionally for severely affected patients they will prescribe a start course of steroid tablets.
- ✓ **Decongestants** Hayfever causes a blocked nose which can be improved by oral or nasal spray decongestants.

When should I seek medical help?

Seek advice from your pharmacist or GP if initial treatment with over the counter preparations doesn't work for you or if any of the following warning symptoms are present:

- **Severity** Hayfever symptoms are so severe they impair your quality of life
- **Asthma** You have asthma and your hayfever is making it worse.

Where can I find out more?

Visit **NHS Choices** (<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Hay-fever/Pages/Introduction.aspx>) for further information. Remember that your pharmacist can also help you with assessing your symptoms and advise on suitable treatments.



111 is the NHS non-emergency number. It's fast, easy and free. Call 111 and speak to a highly trained adviser, supported by healthcare professionals. They will ask you a series of questions to assess your symptoms and immediately direct you to the best medical care for you.

NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.