

Hay fever



Symptoms

The symptoms of hay fever include sneezing and itchiness of the eyes, nose, and throat. Some people also experience tiredness, puffy watery eyes, nasal congestion, or a thin watery nasal discharge. The severity of hay fever symptoms can vary from mild to severe and may impact your quality of life. Congestion of the nasal sinuses can cause pain in the forehead or cheeks that is worse when bending over.

If you have persistent pain in the forehead or cheeks, or thick coloured mucus you should see your doctor

Other allergic reactions can occur in response to something you eat or touch. Some common irritants are nuts, eggs, certain chemicals or plants. In addition to the symptoms of hay fever, there may be a skin rash or hives. More severe reactions include swelling of the mouth or throat and difficulty breathing.

Some severe allergies need immediate medical assistance, so if you have been diagnosed with a severe allergy, carry an *EpiPen* and phone 000 for emergency help.

The symptoms of hay fever and the common cold are similar, however, if the eyes, ears, mouth or throat are itchy, the cause is most probably hay fever. The common cold is caused by a virus. See *Cold and Flu and Coughs* Health Information Brochures for more information and talk to your health professional.

Causes

Hay fever is the common name for 'allergic rhinitis', an allergic reaction that occurs when the body is exposed to air-borne irritants (allergens) such as pollen, pet hair, grass or house dust mites. Allergens stimulate the body to release a chemical called histamine which attempts to rid the body of allergens, such as pollen. Histamine is responsible for the symptoms of hay fever.

Hay fever can occur anytime during the year, but it is more common in spring when the pollen count is higher. Reactions differ depending on the irritants in the air. Hay fever may persist all year round and this may require symptom management on a continual, regular basis.

Lifestyle options

Try to minimise exposure to any known allergic triggers:

- Keep the house and car windows closed.
- Fit the home and car air-conditioning systems with an air-filtering system.
- Remove any plants that trigger hay fever.
- Keep pets outdoors.
- Replace carpet with a hard surface flooring if possible.
- Exercise can help clear the nose. Swim in an indoor pool or use a gym if pollen is a trigger.
- Dust with a damp cloth, use a filtered vacuum cleaner and avoid sweeping with a broom.
- Enclose mattress, quilts and pillows in special covers, or use low allergy bedding.
- Wash bed linen in hot water and leave blankets in the sun to kill dust mites.
- Avoid sheepskin, feather pillows and quilts in the bedroom.
- Raise the head and shoulders in bed.
- Make the house smoke free and reduce the use of air deodorisers and insect sprays.
- Inhaling steam from a shower or vaporiser may help congestion.

Pharmacy options

Always inform pharmacy staff if you are taking any other medicines, or if you have any other health conditions, because some over-the-counter medicines may not be suitable for you

Antihistamines block the action of histamine and can help reduce the symptoms of allergy such as sneezing, itchy and runny nose or red, itchy, puffy, watery eyes. They are available as tablets, liquids or capsules; nasal sprays; and eye drops. To manage mild, intermittent hay fever symptoms use a non-drowsy antihistamine.

Antihistamine eye drops can quickly reduce symptoms of red, itchy, puffy, watery eyes. Some products also contain a decongestant to reduce redness.

Decongestant nasal drops, or sprays, can relieve a congested or runny nose but should only be used for a maximum of 5 days in a row to avoid rebound congestion.

Oral antihistamines are sometimes combined with a decongestant medicine such as phenylephrine to help clear a blocked nose. Ask your pharmacist for advice.

Corticosteroid nasal sprays help to reduce nasal inflammation and congestion. They are recommended for moderate to severe hay fever and should be used every day during the hay fever season. They are most effective with consistent use.

If you experience hay fever all-year around, you can use corticosteroid nasal sprays long term. If using continuously for more than 6 months, then you must consult your pharmacist or doctor. Corticosteroid nasal sprays provide some relief within in a few hours but can take several days to reach full effect.

Nasal saline spray or drops can help to wash away pollen and other irritants in the nose. They are suitable to use in conjunction with other treatments however, should be used about 10 minutes before other medicated nasal sprays.

Pain in the sinus areas may require treatment with an analgesic such as paracetamol or anti-inflammatory medicine like ibuprofen. You can take paracetamol and/ or ibuprofen with antihistamine medication.

Ask your pharmacist for advice on the most suitable treatment for you.

More information

Health Direct: www.healthdirect.gov.au

Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy: www.allergy.org.au

National Asthma Council Australia:
www.nationalasthma.org.au

Disclaimer: The information provided is a guide only, is current at time of publishing, and is not intended to replace the advice of your pharmacist or doctor.

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