

Hay Fever

Hay fever, the common name for allergic rhinitis, is an allergic reaction in the nose, throat and eyes. It commonly occurs in spring and summer, when it is caused by airborne pollens from trees, plants and grasses. Medicines can relieve and prevent symptoms of hay fever.

Hay fever, or allergic rhinitis, is usually caused by inhaling pollens that are present in the air during certain times of the year. However, some people have symptoms of allergic rhinitis all year round, caused by inhaling allergens such as animal dander, mould spores and house dust mites. A doctor can arrange 'allergy skin tests' to help find the cause of allergic rhinitis.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms of hay fever/allergic rhinitis include:

- Sneezing
- Running nose
- Nasal congestion (blocked or stuffy nose)
- Puffy, itchy, watery and red eyes
- Itchy nose, ears, mouth or throat
- Post-nasal drip (mucus in throat), causing a cough
- Decreased sense of smell and taste
- Feeling tired, run-down, irritable
- Dark circles and bags under the eyes.



Hay fever symptoms are often worse in the mornings and on windy days (when airborne pollen levels are highest).

An allergic reaction in the nose can also lead to sinus problems. Sinus symptoms include:

- Sinus congestion
- Pain and pressure around the cheeks, eyes and forehead.

People who get allergic rhinitis often also suffer from other allergic conditions such as asthma, eczema (an itchy skin rash) or hives (itchy, lumpy skin). The symptoms of these conditions may appear or worsen when the allergic rhinitis symptoms appear.

Self care

Try to identify and avoid exposure to the allergens that trigger your symptoms. Ways to reduce exposure to allergens and protect against allergic rhinitis include:

- Stay indoors when pollen count is high e.g., on windy days
- Keep house and car windows closed during pollen season
- Use air conditioning and/or air filtering systems during pollen season. Keep air conditioners and filters clean
- Shower and wash your hair after being outdoors
- Wear wrap around sunglasses and a face mask when gardening or near grass

- Remove house and garden plants that trigger hay fever
- Avoid cigarette smoke and make your house smoke free
- Avoid room deodorisers, mothballs and insect sprays
- Clean your house regularly to remove mould and dust
- Remove dust with a clean, damp cloth; vacuum instead of sweeping
- Reduce dust collectors (e.g., dried flowers, stuffed animals, curtains and upholstered furniture), especially in bedrooms
- Replace carpets with hard surfaces (e.g., timber or tiles)
- Enclose mattresses, quilts and pillows in washable dust mite resistant covers or use low allergy bedding products
- Wash bed linen weekly in hot water (at least 60°C) or use an anti-dust mite washing product. Leave blankets and quilts in the sun for at least four hours to kill dust mites
- Wash soft toys regularly in hot water (at least 60°C)
- Remove sheepskins, hides and woollen and feather bedding from bedroom
- Keep animals outdoors
- Repair plumbing leaks to prevent mould
- Avoid wood burning fires and kerosene heaters.

Medicines

A variety of non-prescription medicines can help relieve and prevent the symptoms of hay fever/allergic rhinitis. Ask a pharmacist or doctor for advice about the best treatment for you.

Medicines for hay fever/allergic rhinitis include:

Antihistamines

- Reduce allergy reactions in the body. Antihistamines can relieve itching, sneezing, running nose and eye symptoms.
- Can give fast relief of symptoms.
- Are available as tablets, syrups, nasal drops and sprays and eye drops.
- Drowsiness is a side effect of some oral antihistamines. Non-drowsy antihistamines are also available.

Decongestants

- Reduce nose and sinus congestion.
- Can give fast relief
- Are available as tablets, syrups and nose drops and sprays.
- Do not use decongestant nose drops or sprays for more than 5 days in a row.

Corticosteroid nose sprays

- Allergic rhinitis involves inflammation of the lining of the nose. Corticosteroid nose sprays (e.g., *Rhinocort*, *Beconase*, *Telnase*) can reduce or prevent this inflammation.
- Can relieve and prevent all the symptoms of allergic rhinitis, including itching, sneezing, running nose, blocked nose and eye symptoms.

Important

Seek medical advice if any of the following symptoms occur with your allergy symptoms:

- Fever
 - Ear ache
 - Swollen glands in the neck
 - Yellow, green or creamy discharge from the eyes
 - Yellow or green mucus in the nose
 - Shortness of breath or wheezing
 - Constant cough.
- Can give some relief within a few hours, but several days of regular use may be needed to achieve the maximum effect.
 - To prevent symptoms, they need to be used continuously throughout the allergy season.

Other treatments

- Ipratropium nasal spray can quickly stop a running nose.
- Saline (salt water) nose spray or drops and saline sinus rinse can help clear mucus from the nose and sinuses.
- Lubricant eye drops (artificial tears) may relieve mild eye symptoms.
- Pain relieving medicines may relieve sinus pain.

Note: There is no firm scientific evidence that diets or dietary supplements can significantly alter symptoms of allergic rhinitis.

For more information

Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy

Website: www.allergy.org.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

***Pharmacists are medicines experts.
Ask a pharmacist for advice when
choosing a medicine.***

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Your Self Care Pharmacy: