

Hayfever

What is it?

Hayfever is a very common condition, affecting millions of people in Britain every year. It is caused by an allergy to pollen or sometimes mould spores. In hayfever the body's immune system over reacts to the presence of external substances. This results in irritation and inflammation.

Hayfever often runs in families, and is also related to asthma and eczema. It is quite common to find a family with some members with asthma, some with hayfever, and some with eczema. Any individual might have more than one of these conditions.

Symptoms

The symptoms vary from person to person and often involve sneezing, runny/blocked nose, red, watery, and itchy eyes, and an associated itchy throat. Often there is also a wheezy chest which suggests a degree of asthma. Unfortunately the peak pollen time is the early summer when school and university examinations take place.

Causes

Different pollens are present at different times of year and thus the time that you are affected depends on the pollen to which you are allergic. Other factors which may aggravate the situation are the weather and the air quality.

Treatment

There are various treatments, some of which are available over the counter from a pharmacist.

- Antihistamine tablets or medicine reduce the effect on the body of one of the main chemicals released by the allergic response.
- Nasal sprays contain steroids and other substances which reduce the local inflammatory response in the nose.
- Eye drops have similar effects on the eye.
- People with asthmatic symptoms need treatment as for asthma.

Prevention

There are several things you can do to lessen symptoms by avoiding contact with the allergens, these include:

- In the summer stay inside between 5pm and 7pm, when pollen counts are usually high. Keep windows and doors closed, especially at these times and when sleeping.
- Damp dust and vacuum your home regularly, to minimise the presence of pollen and dust.
- Airing bedclothes in direct sunlight is also helpful, but avoid times when the pollen count is high.
- Be aware of the pollen count (usually broadcast along with the weather), and avoid areas of high pollen concentration, eg long grass, lawn mowings, and trees if allergic to these. If you need to work in these environments consider wearing a mask and goggles.

Adapted from Medinfo.co.uk, arboris limited.