

# 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 symptoms of hay fever and help prevent them recurring.**

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 – one or both nostrils)
- 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 relieve the symptoms of hay fever/allergic rhinitis and help prevent them recurring. 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 and can relieve itching, sneezing, runny nose and eye symptoms.
- Can give prompt 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 nasal and sinus congestion.
- Can give prompt relief.
- Are available as tablets, syrups and nasal drops and sprays.
- Do not use nasal drops or sprays for more than 5 days in a row, to avoid a 'rebound congestion' effect.

### Corticosteroid nasal sprays

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

## Important

Consult a doctor 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
  - Persistent cough.
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- 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 relieve a runny nose promptly.
- 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 conclusive 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](http://www.allergy.org.au)

### **Healthdirect Australia**

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://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](http://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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