

HAY FEVER

Hay fever is an allergic condition that affects up to 1 in 5 people in the UK. You can have an allergy to pollens from grasses, trees or weeds.

Symptoms of hay fever include:

- frequent sneezing
- a runny, itchy or blocked nose
- itchy or watery eyes
- itchy throat, mouth or ears.

Your face may be painful if your sinuses become blocked. If you have asthma you may find that hay fever makes your asthma symptoms worse. Occasionally, some people with hay fever may lose their sense of smell, have headaches and earaches, and feel tired.

You are more likely to get hay fever if other members of your family have a history of allergies, particularly eczema and asthma.

How can I treat hay fever?

For some people, just avoiding pollen is enough and there is no need for treatment (see section "What else can help?").

Take an antihistamine, such as **cetirizine** or **loratadine**, if:

- your main symptom is sneezing or a runny nose
- you sometimes have itchy, red, watery eyes
- you prefer taking medicines by mouth.

Chlorphenamine is another antihistamine that may help, but it isn't used very often because it can make you drowsy. Take care if you drive or use machinery while taking chlorphenamine.

Cetirizine, loratadine and chlorphenamine are available as tablets or liquids.

A steroid spray for your nose (such as **beclometasone nasal spray**) may help if:

- your main symptom is a blocked nose
- your hay fever symptoms happen often.

Steroid sprays work best if you start using them about 2 weeks before the hay fever season starts and you keep using them throughout the hay fever season. Don't give steroid sprays to children under 6 years old.

Sodium cromoglicate eye drops can be used to treat itchy, red, watery eyes. Don't use these eye drops if you wear contact lenses. Don't give sodium cromoglicate eye drops to children under 6 years old.

Your pharmacist will help you choose a hay fever product that is suitable for you or your child.

If your symptoms are not getting better after using one of these treatments for 2 weeks, talk to your pharmacist. You may need to increase your dose, change the way you are using the treatment, or start taking another treatment as well.

If the treatments work well for your symptoms, you can get further supplies free from your pharmacy for the hay fever season.

What else can help?

- Check the local weather reports to see if the pollen count is high.
- When the pollen count is high, close your windows and doors and stay inside if you can. If you can't stay indoors, try to avoid pollen by:
 - wearing sunglasses that curve around your head
 - putting Vaseline around your nostrils to trap the pollen
 - not drying your clothes outside
 - staying away from grassy areas in the early morning, evening and at night
 - showering and washing your hair after going outside
 - dusting with a damp cloth and vacuuming regularly
 - keeping pets outside, or washing them regularly to remove pollen from their fur
 - keeping your car windows closed
 - buying a pollen filter for your car and changing it at each service.

Do I need to see my doctor?

See your doctor if you:

- have mucus coming out of one nostril - you may have something trapped in that nostril
- have a blocked nose, but you don't have a runny or itchy nose, or sneezing
- are pregnant, breastfeeding or have a child under 2 years old who needs treatment for hay fever
- have symptoms suggesting that pollen is not the cause; for example, you get symptoms in the winter
- have symptoms that persist even after taking your medicines correctly for 2 to 4 weeks
- have serious symptoms, for example, your symptoms are affecting your sleep or work, or your asthma is getting worse.

An optometrist will give you a free Eye Health Examination if you have certain eye problems, including those needing urgent treatment. [Eye Health Examination Wales](#) has a list of optometrists you can go to, or ask your pharmacist for more information.

Where can I find further information?

NHS Direct Wales: www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

NHS Direct Wales Tel: 0845 4647 (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Calls from landlines and mobiles cost 2p per minute, in addition to telephone providers access charge.