



Hay Fever

Seasonal allergies
Allergic rhinitis

Hay fever is an allergic reaction to particles in the air that mainly affect the nose and eyes. Hay fever is seasonal. Some people have allergic rhinitis, which occurs year-round and is caused by indoor allergens.

Symptoms are a stuffy, runny nose with a thin clear discharge; sneezing; red, itchy, watery eyes; swollen eyelids; an itchy mouth, throat, ears, and face; sore throat; a dry cough; feelings of fullness and buzzing in the ears (called tinnitus); headache; tiredness or fatigue.

What causes hay fever and allergic rhinitis?

Hay fever or seasonal allergic rhinitis is caused by an allergic reaction to pollens and spores (depending on the season and area) as they are carried in the air. These may be from flowers, grasses, weeds, or trees; and fungus or the mould growing on dead leaves.

The body's immune system is designed to fight harmful substances like bacteria and viruses. In allergic rhinitis, the immune system over responds to substances that are harmless to most people - like pollen, mould, and pet dander (skin flakes). Indoor particles from, for example, cigarette smoke, dust and household mites, moulds growing on wall paper, house plants, carpeting and upholstery, and cockroaches can trigger an allergic response.

A family history and having other allergies, such as food allergies or eczema, increase the chances of a person having allergic rhinitis. Many people who have allergic rhinitis also have asthma.



How are hay fever and allergic rhinitis managed?

Reducing allergy symptoms is the goal of treatment. The best way to do this is to avoid exposure to the irritating substances. For hay fever, this may mean staying indoors in an air conditioned room on days when the pollen count is particularly high in the environment. For allergic rhinitis this means taking steps such as covering pillows and mattresses with dust mite covers, and using an air purifier.

Observing children's behaviour is helpful. The symptoms of allergic rhinitis may cause a child to wiggle his or her nose and push the nose upward with the palm of the hand to clear obstruction. Allergy testing can identify specific allergens.

Desensitisation is sometimes recommended. This involves regular injections of the substance causing the allergic reaction, in increasing doses to gradually accustom the immune system to the allergen.

Lifestyle and nutrition

If you have hay fever, during days or seasons when allergens in the air are high, stay indoors and, if possible, close the windows, use an air conditioner.

Lifestyle and dietary changes may help prevent or improve symptoms of allergic rhinitis by reducing exposure to allergens. Use pillows and mattress with dust mite covers, clean mouldy surfaces, run an air purifier and reduce indoor humidity, avoid pets, carpets and upholstered furniture, wash bedding every week in hot water, keep stuffed toys out of the bedroom. If you have food allergies, eliminate those foods from your diet.



Medications

If you have hay fever you may be advised to start medications a few weeks before the pollen season. Allergic rhinitis may require daily medication.



Many over-the-counter and prescription decongestants are available. Nasal decongestants are applied directly into the nasal passages with a spray, gel, drops, or vapours and work quickly.

Oral decongestants commonly contain the active ingredient pseudoephedrine or phenylephrine; possible side effects include nervousness, drowsiness, and blood pressure changes. These are also available as eye drops.

Antihistamines relieve sneezing, itching, and irritated eyes.

Anti-inflammatory agents prevent severe allergic rhinitis; examples include nasal corticosteroid (steroid) sprays, leukotriene-antagonists, and nasal cromoglycate.



Supplements

Bromelain: supplements may help suppress cough, reduce nasal mucus associated with sinusitis, and relieve the swelling and inflammation caused by hay fever. It is often given with quercetin.

Quercetin: is a flavonoid and may reduce symptoms of allergic rhinitis, such as a runny nose and watery eyes.

Essential fatty acids: GLA omega-6 fatty acid has a longstanding history of folk use for allergies. GLA is found in spirulina and seed oils of evening primrose, black currant, borage, and fungal oils.

You should try to eat foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids and limit foods with the omega-6 fatty acids found in egg yolks, meats, and cooking oils including corn, safflower.

Lactobacillus acidophilus: contains friendly bacteria that are normally found in the intestines, and enhances the immune system.

N-Acetylcysteine: may reduce nasal congestion.

Vitamin C: there may be a role for this vitamin in treating symptoms of hay fever and year-round allergic rhinitis.



Herbs

Butterbur: has traditionally been used to treat asthma and bronchitis and to reduce mucus.

Echinacea: enhances the activity of the immune system and reduce inflammation.

Evening primrose: may relieve allergy symptoms.

Goldenseal: is considered to be a natural antibiotic and antiseptic, and many herbalists include it in herbal remedies for allergic rhinitis.

Stinging nettle: has traditionally been used for treating a variety of conditions including allergic rhinitis.

Other herbs used traditionally for allergies include astragalus, devil's claw, goldenrod, and liquorice.



Complementary and integrated therapies

Acupuncture

This therapy may be a treatment option for people with allergic rhinitis.

Traditional Chinese medicine

Chinese skullcap is potentially useful for treating allergic rhinitis, particularly when used with other herbs, including stinging nettle.

Biminne is a Chinese herbal formula used to treat allergic rhinitis.

Ephedra, also called ma huang, is used to treat nose and lung congestion.

Homeopathy

Professional homeopaths may consider remedies for the treatment of allergic rhinitis symptoms based on their knowledge and experience.



What else do I need to consider?

Your allergies could trigger other conditions such as eczema, asthma, sinusitis, and ear infection (called otitis media). Seasonal allergic rhinitis may reduce as you become older.



Links and Resources

Lab Tests Online

<http://www.labtestsonline.org.au/>

Inside Radiology

www.insideradiology.com.au

Better Health Channel

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au



Note: For better results, the optimal dosage of herbs or supplements must be used. Please speak with your healthcare provider for optimal dosage information.