

Hay fever

By Dr. Bernadette Veeger, General Practitioner, Centro Mar y Salud



Hay fever is the common name for a condition called seasonal allergic rhinitis. Symptoms are sneezing, a runny nose and itchy eyes. Most people associate hay fever with spring, when airborne pollens from grasses are at their peak.

Allergic rhinitis can also be caused by a reaction to allergens around the home such as dust mites, moulds or animal hair. People tend to get more symptoms during the spring and summer.

Hay fever is an allergic reaction, which means the immune system treats a harmless substance as if it were dangerous, such as a virus, and launches an 'attack'. The nasal passages become inflamed and more mucus is produced.

Hay fever, asthma, food allergy and eczema are related allergic conditions and the tendency to develop them seems to run in families. This is called atopy. This means that the body produces a certain type of antibody in response to allergens. This isn't produced in non-allergic people.

Symptoms can cause difficulty in concentrating or sleeping properly and tiredness. In some people, pollen may also trigger asthma. If you have hay fever-type symptoms all year round, you may also be allergic to house dust mites, pet hair and moulds. This is called perennial allergic rhinitis.

You may be allergic to one or more types of pollen - this will determine when your symptoms are most severe. Some possible causes include:

- Grass pollen.
- Tree pollen.
- Weeds, such as ragwort.

Suggestions to prevent or limit symptoms of hay fever include:

- Check the pollen count forecast on the Internet. Try to stay indoors if it's a high count.
- In spring; stay indoors as much as possible on windy days or after thunderstorms.
- In your garden, - or terrace - choose plants that are pollinated by birds or insects, rather than plants that release their seeds into the air.
- If you have a lawn, be sure to get a nice, big bricked or paved terrace, so you can sit outside without being too close to the pollen.
- Splash your eyes often with cold water to flush out any pollen.

- Reduce your exposure to dust and dust mites, animals and animal hair or fur.

Things that can make your allergy symptoms worse: Aerosol sprays • Air pollution • Cold temperatures • Humidity • Irritating fumes • Tobacco smoke • Wind • Wood smoke

If you have hay fever, your body produces a substance called histamine, which leads to inflammation (redness and swelling) in the nose. Some medications may help the symptoms of hay fever. Ask your doctor for advice. You may be advised to try:

- Corticosteroid nasal sprays – these help reduce the inflammation in the nose, which is the cause of nasal blockage and other symptoms.
- Anti-histamine medications (non-sedating) – these may be useful to control sneezing and itching, but are not as effective as sprays to control a severely blocked or runny nose.
- Eye drops – may relieve itchy, swollen or runny eyes.
- Immunotherapy – some people may benefit from immunotherapy, which exposes a person to increasing amounts of an allergen to improve tolerance and reduce symptoms. This therapy may help hay fever and some cases of asthma, but does not help food allergy.

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Paseo Marítimo, El Morche/Torrox Costa (N-340, Km 281) *Very good access with parking in front of the centre*