

HAY FEVER (Allergic Rhinitis)

Hay fever is an allergic reaction to irritants in the air. It results in inflammation of the mucous membrane that lines the nose.

As many as 1 in 10 people suffer from hay fever at some time in their lives. Hay fever is more common in people with other allergies such as asthma or eczema. Hay fever tends to run in families, and women are more often affected than men.

How does it occur?

Irritants in the air, such as pollens, mold, animal dander, feathers or house dust, are taken in during breathing and cause an allergic reaction. Most hay fever in the springtime is caused by tree pollens. In the summer, grass and certain weed pollens are the cause. From late summer to the first frost, other weed pollens cause hay fever. When the pollen count is high, more people are affected.

Symptoms of hay fever include:

- Itchy nose and throat
- Nasal congestion or a feeling of pressure in your nose and sinuses
- Sore, watery eyes

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor will take a careful history and may suggest skin tests to find out which allergen (irritant) is causing your problem.

Treatment

If the irritant is known, it should be avoided as much as possible. Occasional mild attacks of hay fever can be controlled with a decongestant nose spray, but prolonged use of decongestants can make the condition worse. A steroid nasal spray may also prevent symptoms or help you feel better once symptoms have started. Antihistamine medication taken before you are exposed to the irritant is helpful, but some antihistamines can make you sleepy. Desensitization, which involves injecting gradually increasing amounts of the allergen into the skin, can be a solution for people who need medication throughout the hay fever season.

How can I help myself?

- Follow your doctor's advice for controlling your hay fever.
- Leave your house when it is being cleaned or wear a mask over your nose and mouth when you clean it yourself.
- Vacuum carpets, curtains and soft furniture frequently. Clean hard floors with a damp mop or cloth.
- Remove any mold you find in your home. Use paint on your walls rather than wallpaper. Don't put carpet in damp areas.
- Avoid house plants and pets in your home if they bother you. Don't leave clutter around.
- Stay away from trees and grasses as much as you can in the pollen season.
- Keep doors and windows shut in the pollen season. Use an air conditioner in your house and car.
- Shower or bathe at night to remove pollens or other allergens from your hair and skin.

Contact your physician if you have any questions or problems.