



Spring, the hayfever season

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While most of us welcome the arrival of spring, the longer evenings, better weather, the fresh shoots and flowers in gardens, the blooming nature is dreaded by those suffering from hay fever as the arrival of the sneezing season.

Hay fever affects 15 to 20 % of the population in Britain, where it is mainly caused by grass pollen. It varies from mild forms, which are relatively easy to cope with to a severity which is crippling during the season.

What causes it?

Simply put, hay fever is caused by an immune reaction to a protein or allergen in our environment -such as pollen-, which is normally harmless to the non-allergic person. Usually, the body releases chemicals called histamines as the first stage of an allergic reaction. This can cause inconvenience, or a great deal of misery for sufferers.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF HAYFEVER

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sneezing • Runny nose • Blocked nose • Itching in the nose, throat, and deep in the ears • Headache due to sinusitis caused by swelling in the nose | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red and watery eyes • Itchy eyes • Tightening of the throat and chest • Lethargy • Loss of concentration |
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As different plants come into flower at different times, so the picture of symptoms changes

The hay fever season generally begins with the release of pollen by trees, which can start as early as February and continue to late May. Most people with hay fever are allergic to grass pollens, which appear between May and September but are at their peak in June and July. Later in the year, from summer into autumn, levels of weed pollen and fungal spores rise and may cause problems too.

Weather plays a part...

The worst days are hot, sunny days with light winds and no rain. The heat and sunshine encourages plants to open their pollen sacs, the wind disperses the pollen and the lack of rain means that the pollen remains in the atmosphere longer.

Evening tends to be the peak time for pollen in the city, whereas in the countryside the mid to late afternoon is usually the worst time of day for sufferers.

Rain brings relief

Rain can offer some welcome relief to people with hay fever, as it washes the pollen out of the air. Rainfall in the morning will nearly always keep the pollen count down to low or moderate for the rest of the day. However, rainfall is often followed by an increase in pollen as plants ingest the rainwater and bloom all the more.

10 THINGS TO DO TO REDUCE YOUR EXPOSURE TO POLLEN

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Check the pollen counts; these should be available in your local newspaper, on the radio or weather forecast; symptoms usually begin when the pollen count exceeds 50. 2) Avoid going outside as much as possible when it is humid and windy or when pollen counts are high (worst time of day is often the early evening from 4 to 8pm). 3) If you live in a tall building, keep windows closed during the middle of the day, as pollen rises in the atmosphere. 4) Protect your eyes from pollen with sunglasses. 5) Choose a car with an air-conditioning system (or even a pollen-filtering system on some new models), or keep windows shut as much as possible. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6) Don't put washing out to dry if counts are high as pollen may get trapped in the fibres of clothes and bed linen. 7) Plan your garden carefully. Choose low-risk plants and get someone else to cut the lawn. Send out a fine spray on the hose sprinkler before you go in the garden to dampen down pollen in the air. 8) Wipe down pets with a damp towel after they've been out in the garden, as they may pick up pollen on their fur. 9) Before you go to bed, have a shower to get rid of any pollen caught on your body or hair and sleep with your windows closed. 10) When exercising, apply a small amount of vaseline just inside your nostrils. This acts like a filter and prevents the pollen from going up your nose when breathing deeply. |
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