Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care System

NHS Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board

Patient Information Leaflet

Treating your Hay Fever with Over The Counter (OTC) Medicines

This leaflet contains self-care information about hay fever and how you can treat it yourself with over the counter (OTC) medicines. These can be purchased from pharmacies and other retailers.

What is hay fever and what causes it?



Hay fever (also known as seasonal allergic rhinitis) is a common condition which affects approximately 1 in 5 people in the UK and usually occurs during the spring or summer. It is caused when the body overreacts to substances (allergens) such as pollen from grass or flowers. This leads to symptoms such as:

- Sneezing and coughing
- A runny or blocked nose
- Red, itchy, watery eyes
- Itchy throat, mouth, nose and ears
- Headaches and sinus pain
- Feeling tired

The severity of symptoms can vary from person to person. Some people can manage their symptoms by avoiding triggers, and others may self-care with OTC medication, such as steroid nose sprays, antihistamines and eye drops. Some people suffer symptoms all year round; this is called perennial allergic rhinitis.

Managing your hay fever

Currently, there is no cure for hay fever, but you can ease your symptoms when the pollen count is high.

Do	Don't
✓ Wearing wrap-around sunglasses to stop pollen getting into your eyes.	✘ Cut grass or walk in large grassy areas.
✓ Putting petroleum jelly (e.g. Vaseline®) around your nostrils to trap pollen.	✘ Keep fresh flowers in the house.
✓ Washing your hands, face, hair, rinsing your eyes and changing your clothes after you have been outside to wash pollen off.	✘ Smoke, or be around smoke, as it is likely to make your symptoms worse.
✓ Keeping windows and doors shut as much as possible.	✘ Dry clothes outdoors as they can catch pollen.
✓ If possible, staying indoors when the pollen count is high.	
✓ Vacuuming regularly and dusting with a damp cloth.	
✓ Buying a pollen filter for the air vents in your car and a vacuum with a HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) filter.	
✓ Wiping your pet's coat with a damp microfibre cloth after being outside to remove pollen.	

How will this affect me?
In 2018, following a national consultation and publication of NHS England guidance, the following treatments were no longer available for GP practices to prescribe for hay fever: antihistamines (including cetirizine, loratadine and more recently fexofenadine); steroid nasal sprays and some eye drops. More information is available on the Hertfordshire and West Essex ICB's website.

If you are experiencing common seasonal hay fever symptoms, you should seek support from a pharmacist and/or buy OTC medication to treat your symptoms from a local pharmacy or supermarket. It is important to **always read the medication label, check the dosage and confirm whether suitable for children.**

Your local pharmacists are qualified to provide safe medical advice **particularly if you take any other medicines or have any other medical conditions.** They will be able to advise you on the most appropriate treatment for your symptoms and can also suggest other non-medicated ways of controlling your condition. They will also be able to advise when you do need to see a doctor for your symptoms.

You should see your GP if you experience wheezing, breathlessness / tightness in the chest, are pregnant / breastfeeding, or if your symptoms are not relieved by OTC treatments in combination with measures to reduce your exposure to pollen.

Helpful online resources:

NHS Website	Hay fever - NHS **Antihistamines to treat hay fever symptoms:** Acrivastine (Benadryl): antihistamine medicine that relieves allergy symptoms - NHS Cetirizine: antihistamine that relieves allergy symptoms - NHS Chlorphenamine: drowsy (sedating) antihistamine - NHS How and when to take loratadine - NHS Fexofenadine: antihistamine medicine that relieves allergy symptoms - NHS **Steroid nasal sprays to treat hay fever symptoms:** https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/beclometasone-nasal-spray/about-beclometasone-nasal-spray/ https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/budesonide-nasal-spray/about-budesonide-nasal-spray/ https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/fluticasone-nasal-spray-and-drops/about-fluticasone-nasal-spray-and-drops/ https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/mometasone-nasal-spray/about-mometasone-nasal-spray/ **Anti- allergic medication to treat hay fever symptoms:** Sodium cromoglicate eye drops - NHS
Patient Websites	https://patient.info/allergies-blood-immune/hay-fever-leaflet https://www.allergyuk.org/types-of-allergies/hayfever
You can also visit your local pharmacy for advice	